Knowledge and Experience:
An Exploration of Masculine Subjectivities and Social Justice Education

by

Nicholas Sandor (He/Him)
Bachelor of Social Work (with Distinction), University of Victoria, 2016

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Abstract

This philosophical inquiry challenges the conventional perspective that ‘boys will be boys’ moving towards opportunities for social change through the lived experience of masculinities. The conservative political perspective has failed to challenge the dominant discourse on masculinity, resulting in the maintenance of patriarchal systems that perpetuate issues like sexism and homophobia in our communities. At the same time, social justice spaces are often precarious spaces for privileged males. My inquiry acknowledges masculinity as a state of ambiguity and considers future implications for social justice education through an analysis of male privilege and the epistemic conditions of this particular social location. My conceptual analysis provides a pedagogical exploration that connects interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives related to theories of the self including subjectivities, social performances, and socio-cultural structures of gender identity. My critique of the current status of social justice education directed towards men and boys is explored through dialectics, intersectionality, post-modernism, gender theory, and phenomenology which are used as methods for mapping the hermeneutics of privilege and masculine-oriented experiential knowledge. I suggest that educational reform can offer a humanist approach to learning about gender-based violence by addressing barriers to learning such as opposition, complacency, and ignorance and instead directing resources towards possibilities for change through situated knowledge.
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I would like to thank everyone in my community who is committed to social justice. The work that you do often goes unrecognized, yet your leadership and mentorship has made a huge impact on me personally and my decisions to make my own commitment to improving our communities to be an inclusive, safe and equitable space. I would also like to thank my friends, colleagues, and other community members who have supported my study and engaged in meaningful conversations with me on the topic of masculinities. In particular, I would like to thank both Dr. Graham McDonough and Dr. Wanda Hurren for their commitment to my project and my ideas, and supporting me in challenging myself to take on this difficult topic. I would also like to thank my partner Maria Weaver for the support, patience, and understanding in my commitment to completing this thesis project. I certainly I could not have done this without her support.
Chapter 1: Working Definitions of Masculinity and Education

Men seeking help often find it difficult to find support. We ask them to change without creating a culture of change to affirm and assist them.

—bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, p.185

Understanding Masculinity

The grip of dominant masculinities over our shared social situation is a seemingly impervious structure. It is entrenched in our labour relations, our languages, our social norms, and our political discourse. In many ways, patriarchy maintains a position of normalcy that permits these social forces to appear almost invisible. It is also difficult to untangle the many ways that gender intrinsically connects our social relations and the concept of the Self. I do not claim to be able to unravel all these systems and structures in any exhaustive way, but my inquiry aims to pull on threads that connect masculinities to the challenges of achieving just social relations and educational practices. Chapter One includes an overview of why I have specifically chosen to write on the topic of masculinity, followed by definitions for masculinity, social justice, and humanization, which will be tested throughout this inquiry.

Depending on the context, conventional use of the term masculinity can easily be distorted, and even hidden from view. I find the concept of masculinity to be ambiguous and I struggle to articulate what this word actually represents as it varies across different theoretical perspectives, discourses, and social settings. From some theoretical perspectives, the term masculinity is meant to iterate the dominant position within a patriarchal social structure. In others, it is meant to represent the lived experience of being male. Indeed, many scholars would also assert a
position somewhere in between these polarizing assertions. Often when these two polarized perspectives collide they result in contradiction and conflict. What I perceive as a problem is deciding how masculinities should be taken up in educational projects of social justice based on various competing perspectives.

In my professional capacity, I work as sexual health educator delivering workshops on topics such as: gender, sexuality, health literacy, inclusion, diversity, and intimate relationships. I am particularly passionate about gender-based violence prevention and education that works with masculine-identified individuals. Over the past few years, I have both developed curricula and facilitated education-based groups directed towards those who experience the world through masculine identities. Common themes in my programming are topics such as gender inequality, gender-based violence, and relational performances of masculinity. Indeed, social justice programming with males is taken up by other educators in diverse ways, and later in this chapter I will provide a general framework of the broader pedagogy that informs educational programming meant to challenge gender-based violence by working with individuals who identify as male.

As a community educator working with male youth, there are rewarding moments of connecting to new knowledge, but also moments of confusion, guilt, ambiguity, and distance—the latter being issues that will be explored through this thesis. If men and boys don’t have the experiences and histories to understand gender inequality and gender violence how could they find the will to change and are they even aware that change is needed? Furthermore, I am curious why in some instances learning takes place and other educational moments result in distance or disconnection.
This inconsistency is what drew me towards exploring masculinity as an academic project. The more I reflect on this inconsistency, the more I become overwhelmed by trying to assert any concrete meaning or definition of what masculinity actually is and how it should be discussed. I find myself looking both inwardly and outwardly simultaneously, followed by a myriad of questions related to the possibilities of defining masculinity in ways that could be useful in an educational context. The relationship between gender and social justice education—more specifically the relationship between the embodiment of gender, knowledge, and social learning—are also significant relationships that inform my research. In my experience as a community educator and working with male-identified individuals, I have often observed an inability or perhaps unwillingness from students to engage in topics of structural inequalities on the basis of gender. I have noticed a disconnect between the perceived realities of participants and social justice discourse that connects masculinities to social conditions such as power and violence. Too often, students express sentiments that everyone is already equal or similar ideas that I have interpreted as misinformation, ignorance, and even expressing resistance to these topics in a self-reflexive manner.

I am investigating how philosophical analysis and awareness raising projects relate to mobilizing individuals towards social change through educational programming and pedagogy. In particular, I am drawn to the question, *how should masculinities be understood in projects of social justice education?* This question is complex and entangled with diverse ethnicities, classes, sexual orientations, abilities, experiences, and backgrounds. Additionally, consideration should be given to how masculinities evolve over time, are taken up differently in relation to space, and are also interpreted in various ways. What I suggest is central to a more accurate understanding of
masculinities is an analysis of masculine domination through the use of social symbols and discourses in relation to the lives of individual people and their perceived identities. Perhaps, both ideological structures and subjective experience are also intertwined and there is no requirement to reduce one into the other. What grounds my project is the utility of the term masculine through a hermeneutical lens and exploring how a lived experience of masculinity relates to a broader epistemology of social justice.

The foundation of my thesis provides an analysis of masculinities studies through a critical understanding of the history of maleness and philosophical reflection on the possibilities for masculinity in the future. This includes individuals who embody corporeal masculinity, the cultural structures that maintain traditional Western masculine performances, and how masculinity intersects with a discourse of social and political change. Through the analysis of various theoretical landscapes and constitutions of masculinity, I will consider possibilities for how understanding the embodiment of maleness could be taught, learned, and understood.

Masculinity has great significance in my own life. It intersects with my professional work and my academic research, as well as, informs the embodied perspective through which I understand the world. On both a perceptual and social level, I experience my life and understand myself as a white, cis-gendered, bisexual man living in Canada. These seemingly abstracted characteristics of myself appear to be an ambiguous representation of who I am; nevertheless, they serve as important metrics that identify my relationship to knowledge, power, and privilege. I would also like to assert that I enter this discussion both humbly and cautiously being from the perspective
of a white male. Specifically, my exploration is directed towards understanding masculinity, an identity I embody, yet also an identity that is lived and understood in extremely diverse ways.

I acknowledge my limited perspective on the experience of other social locations and the privilege that comes with my own social location. Although I will offer critiques of intersectionality and other social theories, my intention is not to minimize or replace these immensely valuable ideas and the necessary work these theories do to address power and oppression. However, looking towards the future, one should also ask what limitations are present in our current theoretical landscape utilized to examine relationships across gender and other intersections of identity. Perhaps what I can offer is a lens for new possibilities for the future by both reflecting on and building on the work of others committed to social change.

In some cases, the acknowledgement of privileges associated with a masculine identity is foreign. Bourdieu (1998/2001) speaks to this lack of awareness as the “strange and familiar”, a statement found throughout contemporary sociological literature (p. 5). This suggests that what is familiar often goes overlooked—or becomes normalized—and what is strange is perhaps out of experiential or epistemological reach. Given these conditions that are present in working with males, educators should be asking these two questions in relation to one another: what work is social justice education directed towards males doing to address gender inequality, and how is social justice pedagogy being received by male participants in this type of work?

It is doubtful that my inquiry will provide a concrete solution or path for understanding masculinity in a universal or objective manner. Instead, what will be offered is an exploratory analysis of masculinity including philosophical questions related to: nearness and distance; what
is embodied versus symbolic representation; and how we as diverse and complex individuals understand ourselves in relation to the world. A significant point of analysis is understanding why the concept of masculinity is of importance and why current conceptualizations of masculinity are perhaps inadequate. Providing some clarification for both how I interpret the concept of masculinity and also how masculinity relates to social justice discourse is my first step towards unveiling new pedagogical methods and practices, especially practices that challenge complacency and ignorance in relation to the issues of gender-based violence.

**Why Gender Matters**

First, it is important to unpack why masculinity is an important feature of social justice and why it is a valuable topic of discussion in this context. Bourdieu (1998/2001) observes that masculinities is the work of “symbolic construction”, yet also “differentiated according to the dominant principle of division” (p. 23). Gender differences are not merely defined by way of what is socially constructed in itself, but are assessed and measured through hierarchical structures of domination and subordination. The position of masculinity is signified as a position of dominance and power, and being situated as such offers privileges within a gender-based hierarchy, which is of great concern to social justice scholars. These hierarchies are informed through practices of objectification and subordination, which both have significant implications for one’s social value that is assigned on the basis of gender.

The phenomena of unpaid labour, and the prevalence of violence against women build a strong case that gender inequality persists. More women live in poverty than men. Women are more often expected to provide child care, and complete unacknowledged domestic labour which often
results in limited access to the labour market (Strumm, 2015). Furthermore, Western societies tend to value professional labour over domestic labour, the latter of which is commonly understood as feminized. This observes that much of the work women traditionally do is both unnoticed and undervalued. In the context of violence against women, The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) cited in 2013, that "83% of victims of [reported] spousal violence are female", suggesting that there is also a correlation between gender and violence (p.160). In relation, the Canadian Women’s Foundation (2018) reports that “half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16” (n.p). What these researchers and statistics suggest is that gender inequality does in fact exist, and comes with serious issues as being foundational feature of our shared historical reality. I do not intend to pursue this specific matter in great detail, but rather I point this out to acknowledge these realities as important features of inequality on the basis of gender, and a concern that is central to the goals of my research. My primary focus is on the capability to work towards a more equitable society through education. Specifically, social justice education aims to raise awareness about issues such as gender inequality, gender-based violence, and misogyny. Social justice education is directed towards challenging inequality through various types projects that demonstrate relationships between social identities and hierarchical social conditions.

Social conditions that frame broader gender relations inform what is accessible to individuals and the conditions of their experiences. Beauvoir (1949/2011) observes that “individual possibilities depend upon the economic and social situation” (1949/2011, p. 41). From this perspective, gender identity is not exclusively an autonomous phenomenon; it also intersects with our society’s economic, cultural, and political situation and the inequality that is
consequential of these conditions. Beauvoir’s perspective aligns with Bourdieu’s assertions of symbolic construction by demonstrating that gender may have implications for individual identities; however, the consequences of cultural symbols of gender extend far beyond the realm of what constitutes the embodied self and individual experiences (Bourdieu, 1998/2001). For instance, the cultural construction of gender disrupts what is sometimes understood as ‘natural’, biologically determined, or ‘just the way things are’. Beauvoir (1949/2011) states that “customs cannot be deduced from biology” (p. 42). Instead, gender is understood through a shared cultural situation and the shared cultural symbols of representational identities as they related to social forces such as power and ideology that inform our understanding of gender signifiers. Her observation suggests that the notion of the ‘natural’ is a tool of pseudo-scientific rhetoric that legitimizes domination and subordination, yet in a critical way it cannot justify the work it claims to do (1949/2011). Her observation is also essential for understanding relationships across gender differences because social conditions such as hierarchies of power, pseudo-scientific discourse, and the justification of oppression are processes that are constructed and maintained in relation to social forces. Even scientific discourse—that asserts an ‘objective’ or ‘empirical’ position—is designed, perpetuated, and legitimized through cultural processes (Beauvoir, 1949/2011). To put it bluntly, one’s reproductive organs cannot justify why men are traditionally characterized as ‘the head of the household’ or the idea that women are ‘more suited for domestic labour’. Biology on its own cannot justify these sort of claims. Rather, it is the knowledge-power relationship that maintains the legitimacy of scientific discourse (Foucault 1975/1995). The problem with this power-knowledge relationship is that truth is decided by those from a dominant position or social status. Through positions of power certain forms of knowledge are prioritized and reinforced. Scientific discourse has been used exactly in this way,
suggesting that the male body is somehow physiologically superior; and therefore, suited for positions of power and authority, conveniently ignoring the fact that these scientific systems of knowledge are created by men in a culture of maintaining their own interests and status of power.

A socio-cultural lens for understanding gender is a grounding feature of my research, yet it is not my goal to focus specifically on the fallacies and assumptions of pseudo-scientific rhetoric and the centralization of a discourse of science found in our society. However, what will be explicit in my analysis is an exploration of the relationship between the socio-cultural conceptualization of gender and the embodiment of a self. I do not want to prioritize the social over the individual—or vice versa. It is perhaps inaccurate to assume that we are merely replications of social structures, or on the other hand, to suggest that social structures do not influence one’s sense of self; however, I argue for a theoretical model that demonstrates the relationship between these two perspectives. Furthermore, masculinity cannot be encapsulated in the singular, as masculinity intersects with class, sexual orientation, race, ability, and religion with both temporal and spatial conditions that need to be accounted for. This suggests that masculinity exists as multiple, complex, diverse, and fluid. Masculinity should not be taken up as a rigid or monolithic concept; therefore, there is a linguistic requirement for me to shift my language from masculinity to masculinities. I use the term masculinities to describe: cis-men; boys; guys; dudes; trans-men; men of colour; white men; men who are colonized; men who are colonizers; men who are wealthy; men who live in poverty; men who are queer; people who identified as masculine in the past; people who identify as masculine in the present; and people who may identify as masculine
in the future. It is not for me to decide who should be labeled as a male, but these are some of the ways masculinities will be accounted for in this study.

**Method**

The methods that direct my inquiry are grounded in philosophical exploration. This inquiry is to be considered a conceptual analysis constructed through pre-existing theories of gender, selfhood, knowledge, and political philosophy. Although I will speak to the empirical research of others, my own research is constructed using interdisciplinary analysis through a critical philosophical lens. I would describe this as a critique of pre-existing methods and theories of gender and the self rather than the utilization of a particular guiding methodology. What I aim to achieve through this exploration of philosophical concepts is to determine ways in which interdisciplinary practices can be useful in the context of masculinity studies specific to the context of education and epistemology. From my perspective, there is a rich history of theories that have been useful to explore concepts such as race and gender which are not commonly found and often neglected in the field of masculinity studies and social justice discourse. After reviewing literature from various theorists and scholars, I have included what I believe to be cardinal theoretical considerations that are perhaps helpful towards constructing future of pedagogies of masculinities studies. To be clear, I humbly acknowledge that are theories and perspectives that are omitted from my analysis, but at the same time I made my best efforts to be rigorous and comprehensive in my philosophical inquiry.

The multiple theories guiding my thesis are critical in nature, but are also reflexive by design. Methodologically my thesis exploration could be described as a Heraclitan approach, aligning
with philosophical ideas that acknowledge everything is in a constant state of change. The fragments of Heraclitus’s work such as “you cannot step in the same river twice” or “the sun is new everyday” (cited in Müller-Merbach, 2006, p. 170) observe that the human situation is always one of becoming. The relationships between features of the human condition such as ideas, people, culture, knowledge and history are always shifting and moving making them difficult to essentialize or universalize. Therefore, I account for masculinities as something that is always changing, moving, ambiguous, and precarious, and focus my research on themes such as change, process, and relationships. This changed-based framework not only informs my theoretical perspective, but also acknowledges the rapid pace of emerging gender theory and social discourse. This is especially true in the current political culture of the #metoo movement, which through the stories of sexualized violence survivors is challenging what has previously been ignored or excused as ‘acceptable’ sexual conduct.

While conducting my literature review, I explored much of what I would consider to be the foundational work of contemporary gender studies. My research included an intentionally eclectic approach bringing in ideas from feminism, existentialism, phenomenology, Neo-Marxism, psycho-analytics, queer theory, critical race theory, and post-modern thinking. Bringing these theoretical perspectives together offers both a holistic approach to gender philosophy, while also considering the multiplicities of ways one can take up efforts to challenge gender-based violence.

One observation I would like to make based on my literature review is that the study of masculinities and the study of feminism are each taken up in very different ways. In some ways,
it seems like masculinities studies lacks the same rich diversity and progressive thinking that is found within examples such as feminist and queer theory. Masculinities studies offer insightful accounts of how gender and power intersect—especially when theory includes the perspectives of those who are marginalized and I support the perspective that centralizing marginalized perspectives is a vital step towards meaningful emancipatory work (Crenshaw, 1991). However, my specific intent is to explicate the relationship between the embodiment of masculinities and social justice discourse as a form of knowledge; not as something meant to deprioritize marginalized voices, but instead provide an analysis that demonstrates what perspectives are currently unavailable in the field of masculinities studies. What I perceive as missing is a perspective that explores the existential element of social change; one that includes life paths and personal relationships to knowledge. I cannot claim that an existential and humanist perspective on masculinities does not exist in masculinities studies, but from my own research it is rare to come across the work of feminist theorists such as Sara Ahmed or Donna Haraway being used to talk about masculinity from the position of embodying maleness. According to Middleton (1992) “[m]asculinity can only be understood by using post-structuralist theory, because feminism has already been situated in this radical space. Any other accounts of masculinity would be conservative and so potentially supportive of men’s power” (p. 132). This insight is valuable because I would consider these aforementioned feminist theorists to be some of the most impactful gender theorists of our time, theorists who offer post-structuralist perspectives that may be progressive and thoughtful enough to collectively move our society towards a future of improved relationships across genders. Combined, their theories have disrupted the boundaries of how gender, identity, language, culture, power, knowledge, and reality are discussed. I reflect
on this because I think there is value in applying these ideas to the way educators work with masculine-identified individuals.

I would push back slightly on Middleton’s remark and say that masculinities should not be exclusively understood using post-structuralist theory. As I will discuss in later chapters, post-structuralist philosophy asserts some problematic assumptions in the context of concepts such as agency and social change. In fact, there is a risk of movement towards nihilism within the post-structuralist movement, similar to the problem of solipsism sometimes found in existentialist thinking. Be that as it may, post-structuralist theories should be one of many important mechanisms used for disrupting problematic social relations across gender by considering that the post-structuralist perspective posits many important questions that are not addressed through modernist philosophical frameworks. This is not to say that we should abandon Neo-Marxist perspectives on relationships of power. I utilize a synthesis of these various perspectives throughout my thesis. It is important to broaden the scope of analysis by including theories developed in the margins as a method for understanding masculinities. There are two reasons why I will employ this strategy. First, it may disrupt androcentric origins of theory by including post-structural theorists that provide diverse voices from various social locations that are missing from philosophical perspectives from the 19th and 20th centuries. This includes utilizing the work of queer, female-identified, transgender, racialized, and Indigenous scholars. Second, a theoretical account of change established in the classical philosophy of Heraclitus extends to the post-structuralist perspective that includes: precarity; multiplicities; non-totalizing; and relational thinking, which are important ontological factors that are often lacking in traditional Western philosophy.
These Western ways of thinking are observed through what is described as “masculinist epistemologies [which are] built upon values that promote masculine needs and desires, making all others invisible” (Kaschak, 1993, p. 11). Making a shift in masculinities studies that includes novel theoretical considerations provides the ability to add richness to critiquing our current state of affairs, and also expands the ability to unpack new and emerging theories and ways of knowing. In addition, an intentionally eclectic approach can offer insight into what identities do. For example, post-structuralist thinking is situated in process and relationships, which can offer an explanation for why connections matter and how connections are made (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2016). It can help us to understand how masculinities are related to violence, inequality, political rhetoric, and knowledge.

On August 12th, 2017, Helen Heyer was murdered in Charlottesville, Virginia where she was struck by a car and killed while many others were injured. This tragedy took place at a white nationalist protest against the removal of statues depicting Confederate military figures Robert E. Lee and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. The significance of the call for these statues to be removed was due to their association with America’s racist history, including practices of slavery and segregation (Vice News 2017). Social justice advocates expressed concern regarding the celebratory nature of these public figures depicted in these statues. This tragedy exemplifies the increasingly divisive and violent relations situated in identity politics. This event was not self-contained, but instead is connected to processes of: politics, race, gender, history, slavery, activist culture, and ideological values. One way these connections could be understood is as components through which one understand themselves, and their relationship to others, and the world. While watching the coverage provided by Vice News—a left-leaning online news
organization—the Charlottesville event provides a terrifying account of powerful imagery of crowds of people yelling “white lives matter” and “blood and soil” across the courtyard, while adjacent to the white nationalist protesters, social justice activists yelled “black lives matter, no Nazis, no KKK, no fascist USA” (Vice News, 2017). Political affiliation aside, the common thread through all these statements is the issue of what identities do both in opposition to others and also as an affirmation of the self—both being of ontological significance. Identity affirmation is fundamental to self-consciousness. In some cases, it can be a driving force that leads to extreme acts of violence. This demonstrates how imperative identity is to understanding the human condition, as some people are willing to go to extreme measures to assert their identities and condemn the representational identities of others. The various statements being chanted from all sides of the events in Charlottesville centralize identity in my discussions of politics and social relations. Even without explicitly exploring the rhetoric of these diverse political groups, it seems that the people associated with this tragic event desire to be acknowledged for the person that they think they are and what they believe other people to be.

This understanding materializes through ideology, power, perceived rights, and many other regulatory forces of socialization. For myself the statement “blood and soil” is a terrifying, yet powerful example of the ontological connection between being human and existing in-the-world. The Charlottesville tragedy is also a specific context of social relations premised on extreme opposition. One should also consider that many white people do not consciously subscribe to racist ideological beliefs and I am curious about what factors drive people towards certain exclusionary practices and beliefs. Perhaps, radical belief systems are socialized through specific intersections of trauma, privileges, expectations, learning, place, and time. Perhaps, accessing ‘alt-right’ ideology may even materialize as an unintentional encounter with a white supremacist
media site, or racist perspectives on immigration practices expressed by a family member. The point is that all these factors matter, inform one another, and provide specific opportunities that require not only an analysis of power, but also consideration for spatial and temporal elements that connect people to misguided representations of truth. Post-structuralist thinking can provide something useful for the analysis of these positionalities. As a method, post-structuralism allows one to access networks of epistemology and political understandings of social relationships across difference and leaves room to look at the multiple possibilities through which identities manifest in diverse and fluid ways.

Fluidity and multiplicity are precisely why one’s understanding of identity needs to move beyond representational identities insofar as it does not account for in-group differences and influential factors of identity formation beyond categories such as gender, race, and class. However, I will often refer to representational categories of people in this thesis, because these categories do matter. The relationship between representational identities and social conditions can be utilized to measure inequality and mechanisms of marginalization that assist with identifying positions of oppression and power (Crenshaw, 1991). From my own understanding of social theory and my own personal experiences, inequality on the basis of identity does exist and people experience racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression that need to be accounted for. However, the limitations of rigid structures for conceptualizing identity perhaps overlook the nuances of life histories and pathways that also inform one’s sense of self.

In consideration of the multiplicities of identity, my method of analysis is a critical exploration of masculinities, one that offers diverse theoretical perspectives spanning various historical
periods, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. My hope is that this diversity of theoretical considerations will disrupt a linear path of understanding masculinities, which is sometimes misrepresented as a monolithic structure. It is also likely that I will exit this exploration with more questions than answers. However, what I do hope to accomplish is to push the discourse of challenging masculine domination towards previously unexplored questions that can be useful for constructing more equitable and anti-oppressive social relationships.

The methodology that will guide my analysis is informed through some of the ideas of Susan Strega’s work: first, her perspective accounts of the relationship between post-structuralist thinking and anti-oppressive research methods (Strega, 2015). She states that, “feminism and poststructuralism working together raise useful questions about knowledge, power, truth, difference, and the constitution of the self that makes material contributions to challenging the status quo” (p. 133). Strega observes that we need to question what makes sense in our attempts to define truths (2015). This idea of mapping truth in relation to identity is essential to the analysis provided in my study. This is precisely because scholars need to be critical of the philosophical assumptions that come with emerging theories of social justice. Furthermore, researchers and academics also need to be critical of emerging theories and the current status of truth. I agree with Strega that metrics such as knowledge and power are essential to understanding what types of knowledge are both privileged and normalized, but I pay particular attention to her suggestion that we need to account for emerging and multiple truths which make space for subjectivity and personal experience (Strega, 2015). Subjectivity and personal experience seem to be left out of the discourse concerning masculinities studies and this
oversight has consequences for social justice education aimed at working with embodiments of masculinity.

According to Strega (2015), we also need to be cautious of post-structuralist thought, insofar as it lends itself to our possibly becoming deceived by the idea that subjectivities are merely a result of structures of language and discourse. She reflects on the Foucauldian lens concerning discourse and the concept of agency by suggesting that if we categorize our identity as a product of discourse then we “abandon the importance of experiential knowledge” (p. 140). I do not deny the enormous influence that language and discourse have on our social relations. However, one’s specific life experiences are also influential by way of the relationships between experience and knowledge. Instead of abandoning a post-structural analysis, Strega has provided strategies that I would suggest humanize a critical and theoretical exploration of gender. First, she suggests that as researchers “we must assess political implications and usefulness of what we produce for progressive, anti-oppressive politics in marginalized communities” (p. 144). Second, researchers must ask themselves who benefits from the work that they do, and who are they trying to reach with their ideas? Finally, she observes that researchers must practice reflexively by researching in a way that disrupts our assumptions and biases, accounting for where knowledge emerges, and taking an anti-oppressive approach that acknowledges the importance of voices in the margins that are often silenced in our current relations of power (pp. 143-144).

By utilizing Strega’s perspective as a framework for my research, I acknowledge the importance of creating space for multiple voices, while simultaneously noting that my goal is to provide a meaningful educational experience for boys and men in the context of social justice education.
Therefore, my reading of the theories I have chosen to explore is situated in relation to this particular goal. Above all, I aim to provide insight into finding a space for male-identified individuals in social justice education—a space where males can explore their own realities and experiences that account for their understanding of social relations that both prioritize marginalized voices and acknowledge the problem of androcentric epistemology.

**Defining Masculinity**

Before attempting to provide my own interpretation of how masculinities could potentially be defined, I think it is useful to examine how masculinities have been characterized across multiple theoretical frameworks. This literature review includes the various theoretical frameworks that are typically used to conceptualize masculinities theory such as feminism, social constructivism, sex-role theory, and Neo-Marxism (Kahn, 2009). Subsequent chapters will cover some of these theoretical perspectives in more detail, but at this point I will characterize masculinity as an ambiguous situation. Kahn (2009) argues that masculinity cannot not be “directly observed or measured” and instead is represented through the analysis of social conditions and personal experiences (p. 3). For example, power and privilege are prevalent metrics used in the study of masculinities, yet other theories such as education, labour, language, or psycho-social analysis are also useful for understanding how masculinities are socially constructed (Connell, 2005). Although each theory I review takes up masculinities differently, these differences effectively demonstrate how various perspectives take up social justice discourse related to men—each having its own strengths and weaknesses. I will pay particular attention to theories that can provide insight into thinking, learning, and understanding, which includes the ability of these
theories to demonstrate relationships between individual perceptions and social relations across all genders.

My point of departure for grounding a discussion of masculinity will be Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity. First, Connell’s work is useful because it provides a genealogical account of theories of masculinity as a contribution to understanding how masculinities have been taken up historically. Second, Connell’s theories are useful for disrupting the notion that masculinities can be objective or centralized through biological determinism or sex role theory. Determinism and other essentialist theories of gender identity reduce gender to binary thinking or rhetoric by suggesting there is a universal or natural male or female position. Instead, Connell’s work argues that these naturalized ways of defining gender are both multiple and diverse. Hegemony in the context of masculinity, is utilized by Connell as a metric assessing for the idealized masculine form that all other forms of masculinities are assessed against, which is unavailable or inaccessible to most people (2005, p. 77). Although Connell does not provide a visual representation of this work, perhaps one can imagine a pyramid with the hegemonic form at the apex and various constitutions of masculinity making up the base. Connell (2005) would conceptualize the constitutions that are part of the pyramid’s base to be in forms ranging from complacent masculinity to compulsory heterosexuality, which I discuss in more detail in chapter two. These different categories of masculinities account for political, cultural, social, and economic structures that influence how masculinities are constructed through diverse lived experiences and social identities.
Another common method characterizing masculinities is sex role theory. Sex or gender roles include markers such as “emotions, attitudes, personality traits, and interests” (Connell, 2005, p. 21) that are representative of a perceived gender category, these are thought to be measurable ways of distinguishing expectations of masculinity or femininity norms or “cultural elaborations on biological sex differences” (p. 22). What seems to be missing in sex role theory is a critical analysis of how social structures such as family or labour account for power and sex role theory overgeneralizes a prescribed way of doing gender which is further complicated by temporal and spatial formulations of cultures and cultural shifts. Gender is not static, and according to Connell (2005), social theorists working in this field eventually came to the realization that these ideas were not only socially constructed in relation to capitalist structures, but also culturally specific. What was commonly believed to be ‘natural’ was re-conceptualized as learned behavior specific to particular groups of people and varied across cultures. Advances in ethnography observe diverse performances that contradict assumptions about gender roles and behaviour that were perceived as being natural (Connell, 2005). For example, Tatonetti (2015) describes the embodiment of Two-Spirited identities found in some Indigenous cultures here in Canada, where individuals who may present as male or female have both masculine and feminine characteristics. These formulations of identity are accepted and valued as part of community, traditional social order, and cultural heritage, breaking from the binary Westernized discourse of gender. Indigenous scholars also demonstrate the cultural diversity of masculinities using the example of “big moms” who are characterized in Indigenous stories and oral histories as individuals who are considered strong and masculine leaders that also happen to be women (Tatonetti, 2015, p. 133). These ideas disrupt assumptions about what can be constituted as masculine versus maleness and blur the lines between what identifies masculinity as male and
femininity as female. Furthermore, Tatonetti’s analysis disrupts the notion that all manifestations of masculinities are produced by Western or Eurocentric formulations of gender identity. Indeed the experience of maleness is quite diverse, and not always masculine in its constitution.

The diversity of masculine expression also extends beyond culture. Connell (2005) argues that that sex role theory is problematic, stating that “masculinity is never a pure state” (p. 10). Logically, one can point towards their own experiences and recognize that masculinities are presented and performed in diverse ways if one examines their own life history. However, masculinity is not always conceptualized with this diversity in mind. Connell’s work disrupts a homogeneous conceptualization of masculinity and demonstrates examples of diverse accounts of maleness through the theory of masculine plurality. However, and as I will discuss in chapter two, plurality may be an oversimplification of what constitutes masculinities and maleness.

Masculine identities are further complicated by diverse and situated knowledge: one’s subjective perceptions of the world. Taking this complexity into consideration, my intention is to explore a reflexive approach for defining masculinities by including phenomenological and hermeneutical theories of identity and knowledge construction. Connell posits the question “is it actually masculinity that is a problem in gender politics? Or is it rather the institutional arrangements that produce inequality, and thus generate the tensions that have brought ‘masculinity’ under scrutiny” (2005, p. 42, emphasis in original). Connell (2005) goes on to say that it is likely an interplay between both subjectivity and social relations. One should not overlook the impact of institutional relationships upon masculine socialization. Patriarchy is entangled with colonization, capitalism, globalization and other ideological forces of power. Acknowledging the
relationships between subjectivities and social relationships is helpful for understanding the mechanisms of socialization and how these mechanisms intersect with perceptual experiences. This integrated approach also aligns with the use of post-structural analysis in the context of masculinities insofar as it provides a method of connecting social symbols and individuals to processes and relationships. Perhaps a post-structural approach provides new possibilities for teaching boys and men about social justice issues? However, and as mentioned previously, this type of analysis still seems to be widely absent in the field of masculinities studies.

In social justice discourse the more contemporary term toxic masculinity is often used in place of hegemonic masculinity to describe masculine performance that marginalizes others and maintains patriarchal hierarchies utilizing violence to assert representational power. Haider (2016) observes toxic performances of masculinities as the way “violence becomes the mode by which one asserts one’s masculinity” (p. 558). Haider argues that when expressions of hegemonic masculinity cannot be materialized, or “when it does not deliver the power or prestige it is thought to” disillusionment related to the ability to assert one’s masculinity takes form in acts of violence (p. 558). Though this logic, acts of violence become instruments of protest or resistance to change when other methods fail to materialize one’s masculinity.

Haider’s work (2016) observes this theory as praxis by utilizing the example of the Orlando shooting in 2016. During this tragic event, gunman Omar Mateen took the lives of 49 people attending an event at Pulse nightclub. The particular event being held was directed towards celebrating the LGBTQ community, particularly those who identified with the Latino community. The gunman self-identified as an affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.
(ISIS) and the murders were reported as being ideologically motivated (Ellis, Fantz, Karimi, & McLaughlin, 2016). Although masculinity was not named as a motivating factor in these tragic events, ideological entanglements such as race, religious extremism, and sexual orientation, become intertwined with expressions of toxic masculinity. What is implicated in the use of violence, and as a regulatory practice of hegemonic masculinity, is compulsory heterosexuality being a mechanism of regulation through the use of violence. Compulsory heterosexuality asserts that there are limited acceptable ways to express male sexuality and attraction (Connell, 2005). Although masculinity is not named explicitly as a motivating factor, the culture of hegemonic masculinity does align with the use of violence: both to assert one’s self and as a regulatory practice against marginalized groups. Therefore, patriarchy has a relational status to other significant ideological factors and is utilized in the justification of these sorts of violent acts.

From a traditional perspective, men are supposed to take action, and assert themselves through methods that legitimize hegemonic masculinity a form of ideological regulation. Combining both ideological motivations and the use of violence observes that hegemonic and toxic masculinity work in synthesis: masculine hegemony being the measure of evaluating performances of masculinity in relation to ideology, while toxicity is the means through which non-conforming performances are regulated.

What both the Orlando and Charlottesville tragedies have in common is that they demonstrate a connection between regulatory practices of hegemonic masculinity and violence. However, what is interesting is the different ideological and cultural perspectives these people subscribe to—one attacker identified as a white nationalist and the other as allegedly connected to radical Islamic practices. These are very different social positions in the hierarchy of masculinity, yet both these
potions are affirmed through the use of violence. It is worth exploring how masculinity relates to these events and if a catchall term can capture what motivates people to commit these crimes. Furthermore, it demonstrates how toxic and hegemonic masculinities manifest throughout various social positions.

I often encounter the signifier *toxic masculinity* in my consumption of online media, yet there seems to be no cohesive definition of this term. Journalist Ryan Douglass at Huffpost (2017) reports that “toxic masculinity is built on two fundamental pillars: sexual conquest and violence—qualities men regale as manly and virtuous”. In contrast, Everyday Feminism writer, Sincere Kirabo (2017) identifies toxic masculinity as “harassment”, “misogyny”, and “misunderstanding consent”. The first, being intrinsically intertwined with masculine identities, and the latter being associated with the behaviour of certain types of men. Toxic masculinities can also have a more subjective context. It can be understood through personal relationships and experiences where the political and social factors are somewhat hidden from view. The following comic strip written and illustrated by Luke Humphris (2017) provides an example of not only how toxic masculinities is commonly defined, but also how this might present itself in one’s day-to-day life.
Figure 1. What do we Mean When we say “Toxic Masculinity?” Comic Strip from The Nib (Humphris, 2017, used with permission of author and illustrator).
In a bad relationship as an adult, I received a black eye and a split lip. I was open with a few people about what had happened.

When I hit my lowest point -- drinking too much, staying in bed all day -- I emailed my dad to explain I was stuck and I didn't know what to do, but the answer was just to be strong.

No one offered help. It felt implied that it was my own ineptitude which let it happen.

Putting up a tough exterior is a great way to make people not worry about you, but that is all it does.

And then there was my big brother who I looked up to. In my eyes he was superior -- stronger.

I didn't know he was suffering; he never told me about his troubles.

He took his own life.

At the funeral, I heard my grandfather tell my dad to toughen up and be strong even at your own son's funeral. It was unacceptable to mourn or let it out.

Even at his age, dad was still encouraged to bury it.
Humphris’ comic acknowledges that not all performances of masculinity are intrinsically toxic. Instead, toxic manifestations of masculinity are informed through particular practices and performances situated in our close relationships and life experiences. Toxicity is often reinforced through shame, guilt, or violent reinforcement when individuals deviate from hegemonic performances of masculine behaviour or feel shame for expressing emotional or ‘feminine’ behaviour that disrupts the normative masculine script. The comic also suggests that the consequences of dissent impact one’s sense of identity and general wellbeing. This perspective
on toxic masculinity recognizes that toxic masculinity is not only an issue for those on the margins, but also has negative consequences for men and boys regardless of their social position.

What this comic does well is demonstrate process and relationships in a way that is experiential and acknowledges how toxic masculinities manifest in personal life experiences—something that is absent in both Kirabo (2017) and Douglass’s (2017) accounts of toxic masculinity. This also seems to be missing in the media representations of events like the Orlando shooting or the Charlottesville tragedy. Reports on toxic masculinity have difficulty going beyond the ideological motives and political implications of these tragic events. Moving towards questions related to how subjectivities and perceptions inform violent behaviour is not meant to minimize the severity of these acts. Instead, it provides an opportunity to understand and analyze subjective experience that escalates to the level of toxic masculinity and use of violence. An analysis of subjectivity can provide a way of understanding why individuals are driven towards these extreme and violent behaviours. Furthermore, a failure to speak of the impact of masculine socialization—in the context of these violent acts—maintains the veil of patriarchal normalcy, focusing on other aspects of these crimes, such as race, or extremism. What results is a minimization of the relationship between patriarchy, violence, and other forms of oppressive ideology.

How violence is reported in the mainstream media, suggests that social discourse is often reluctant to identify masculine hegemony as an influential factor in these extreme acts of violence. For instance, the Orlando nightclub shooting was associated with the terrorist organization ISIS. The Boston Marathon bombing also shared a similar narrative with reported
ties to terrorist activity. However, in the case of a recent tragedy in Las Vegas, media reports seemed to ignore the idea that identity could be a factor that led to these events. On October 1st, 2017 Stephen Paddock opened fire at a Las Vegas music festival that left 58 people dead and another 500 injured. This was one of the most violent mass shootings to date in American history. The response from media was basically confusion as to why Paddock was driven to commit these horrific crimes, or at least justified as being related to mental health issues. On October 7th 2017 CNN reporters Ann O’Neill, & Bob Ortega’s covering the Las Vegas shooting published the headline: *The Unknowable Stephen Paddock and the Ultimate Mystery: Why?* Instead of speaking of the connection between masculinity and violence, mainstream media created distance from masculinity as an issue and failed to address the masculine-violence connection by maintaining and legitimizing patriarchal values through dominant discourse. This demonstrates a failure of society to engage in a discussion about toxic masculinity as a serious issue. If this crime was committed by a person of colour, or in the name of religious extremism the media headlines would read quite differently. In these cases, the problem is transferred to Islamic extremism, white nationalism, and mental health issues, any of which acts as a scapegoat to avoid a critical discussion of masculinity altogether. Creating distance from openly discussing toxic masculinity disempowers our society’s ability to problematize toxic masculine behaviour. Therefore, this behaviour often goes unnoticed, unaccounted for, and the dominate discourse remains one of radical ideology or mental health issues as an excuse to disguise and maintain patriarchal norms.

If one considers theories like hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) and toxic masculinity (Haider, 2016) as the concepts that describe what is
wrong with masculinity we also need to consider what is right—or perhaps what we plan to move towards. Gelfer (2011) describes these problematic aspects of masculinity as “the masculine conspiracy” (p. 12) or the problems of masculinity that result in violence and oppression, which includes the aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are taken for granted, normalized, and naturalized. He observes the need to unpack the myths contained within this conspiracy, and the need to problematize what is taken for granted (2011). Of particular importance, he also argues that people should consider that the implications of dismantling patriarchy without the replacement of something ontologically significant or self-affirming are that this removal leads to a loss of identity. According to Gelfer “when the masculine conspiracy is exposed and inevitably cast aside, it leaves a gap, a lack of something. If that gap is not filled, the conspiracy will come rushing back as the only option on the table” (p. 12). Therefore, one is faced with an important philosophical question in the context of social change: what does the future of masculinities look like?

This absence of self-affirmation in projects of change are problematic insofar as it is rarely discussed in masculinities studies. Seldom does the literature discuss what this gap should become or could be filled with. Masculinity is an important feature that can help one to understand the motivation behind events such as the Orlando shooting and the Charlottesville incident. Gelfer (2011) reflects on the idea that the options that are made available and seem affirming on an individual level are likely the options people will associate themselves with. If identifying with a terrorist organization or a white nationalist group provides some affirmative sense of belonging or identity, people might find themselves interested in joining these types of groups. This is not to excuse this violent and horrifying behaviour, but it demonstrates an
ontological desire to connect our sense of self to something meaningful. From my perspective, this ontological desire to connect to ourselves is so intense that people are willing to go to these extreme measures to materialize a sense of self-affirmation. I will return to this idea in detail in chapter four, when I conceptualize masculinity as a negative space, but I think it is important to identify this gap now as it will be accounted for throughout this research and as my discussion moves into the themes of education and humanization.

Another important barrier for materializing social change is captured in Connell’s theory of complacent masculinity. Connell (2005) states that complacent masculinity is “constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being front line troops of patriarchy” (p. 79). The patriarchal dividend can be understood as the unearned advantages and privileges of masculine corporeality and identity. From the perspective of complacency, men will likely not perceive themselves as part of the problem, and will not likely be motivated to be actively involved in social change. The idea of complacency provides one with a way of accounting for the gap and is perhaps an issue that is necessary in addressing or challenging toxic or violent behaviours. The notion of complacency identifies why mobilizing men is difficult and demonstrates why problematic constitutions of masculinity are legitimized and maintained.

Considering the various ways that my literature review has conceptualized the breadth and depth of masculinities, there is overwhelming evidence as to why gender inequality continues to be an issue. Regardless of the specific theoretical position one chooses, it seems there are two issues that are cardinal to conceptualizing masculinities. First, individual experiences and differences are positioned diversely within conceptual frameworks of masculinities. Second, there is an
aversion to talking about how masculinities could be conceptualized differently in the future. What I can account for is that it is problematic that masculinities continue to be expressed through acts of violence and most of the work being done is identifying how this is an issue rather than exploring avenues to change problematic behaviours. If social justice education does not include a pedagogy of what men are supposed to be moving towards, then it is likely that it will be difficult for men to connect with opportunities for change that are both ontologically meaningful and socially accountable.

**Social Justice Education**

It is important to clarify what actually constitutes educational practice. From my perspective, education can be correlated to accessing or constructing knowledge in relation to the world. Therefore, my discussion of education reaches beyond classrooms and includes the acquisition of knowledge that involves relational interactions with the Self, the world, and the Other. This includes individual interactions with social media, blog posts, podcasts, political engagement conversations with friends, graphic novels, and personal reflection. I have already discussed media as a form of education. It is these daily headlines and the conversations in comment sections that follow the headlines that either reinforce our own confirmation bias or allow us to grasp understanding the world from another perspective. Although some of the narratives I present may not be academically situated, they demonstrate how information is shared in the common public discourse, and the position from which most people learn and engage with identity politics on a daily basis. This has value because it is representative of the current culture of knowledge, and how one is situated in educational pursuits of social justice utilizing both formal and informal systems of learning and knowledge acquisition.
It is difficult to provide a universally accepted account how of social justice education should be
defined. Social justice education (SJE) includes diverse theoretical frameworks and spans across
many academic disciplines, community projects, and specialized areas of focus. According to
Bialystok (2014) “there is no single concept of SJE but rather a constellation of discursive and
pedagogical practices that emerge from various intellectual and political traditions” (p. 418).

Equal access to basic liberties could be close to what might be considered the core of a
philosophy of justice. Famously, John’s Rawls first principle of justice states that “each person is
to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a
similar scheme of liberties for others” (1999 p. 53). As a guideline, I would suggest that equality
and liberty are near the heart of justice, yet at the same time recognizing that these signifiers for
social justice in themselves are often taken up in problematic and contradictory ways—
contradictions that remain unresolved since the Socratic dialogues. However, the contradictory
usage of the term social justice will be considered throughout various examples in my inquiry to
explore the relationship between justice and knowledge.

Rather than attempting to totalize what social justice may be, it is more relevant to this project to
speak to how social justice education is taken up as praxis. What can be observed are themes that
can be found throughout social justice literature that demonstrate the goals of this type of
education. As described by McCusker (2017) social justice education takes up the task of:

- effecting social change, redefining pedagogical power and authority, valuing personal
  experience, diversity and subjectivity, reconceptualising classrooms as spaces for social
  justice, and using learning to help students to become activists and go beyond the
classroom to effect the necessary wider changes that are needed. (p. 4)

The ability to gain an understanding of power, community action, personal experience, and social change resonate with me as essential features of a pedagogical framework for social justice education. How this is represented in practice will likely vary depending on the specific group educators and activists are working with. My own focus is working with male-identified individuals; therefore, these themes will be useful in the context of this particular social location, especially regarding discussions of power, privilege, violence, and gender inequality.

In the context of social justice discourse, an understanding of power and privilege is directed towards the achievement of healthier relationships across genders. This is often cited in social justice literature as demonstrating the importance of developing skills that lead towards social equity (Keddie & Mills, 2007; Martino, Mills, & Lingard, 2005; McCusker 2017). As I described previously, power is an essential feature that informs continued practices of gender inequality. In fact, the conventional notion of power is implemented in the maintenance of the current social order and legitimizes a hierarchical relationship across genders.

The concept of power can be taken up in diverse ways and it is important to clarify how I will take up this term in the context of my specific research. Foucault’s concept of power seems to do the work that I need it to do insofar as he conceptualizes power as a relational force between bodies and social regulation. Importantly, Foucault (1975/1995) observes power as a force that is “exercised rather than possessed” (p. 26). This demonstrates two things: first, that power is regulated through social practices and second, that individuals do power rather than have power.
Foucault observes that we do not embody power in the corporeal sense, but it is the “political technology of the body” (p. 26) which leads to practices of discipline and punishment as forms of regulation and conformity to social norms. Second, physical bodies may not always be the direct targets of punishment, but instead punishment is enacted through bodies symbolically by way of social regulations such as rights or laws (Foucault, 1975/1995). Through this lens, the force of power—the beingness of a knowledge of power—and the use of authority regulates bodies through punishments that are hierarchical in their implications. According to Foucault, bodies understood in this way are an “instrument” or “intermediary” (p. 11) of symbolic power that regulate a certain set of social conditions and what one knows about those social conditions as being a regulatory practice. According to Foucault, there is an intrinsic link between power and knowledge in that “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (p. 27). Therefore, what ‘we’ know about bodies, and what ‘we’ know about gender is constructed through the structural arrangements of knowledge that inform socially accepted conditions. If knowledge is informed through expressions related to power then it is clear that our social conditions—in this case and as they relate to gender—are produced not only through historical norms, but also through political discourse and institutional authority. Going forward in this thesis, power will be understood as a means of social regulation, but also as a method of constructing knowledge as it applies to these regulatory practices and norms. This assertion is also made with the consideration that power is exercised relationally both through the maintenance and legitimization of gender norms, but also through acts of dissent and resistance to norms and the structures of power.

There is a connection between regulatory behaviour and social justice education. According to
Keddie and Mills (2007), social justice programs aimed at male-identified youth address issues such as “misogyny and homophobia in schools” (p. 207). They go on to suggest that one of the goals of gender justice pedagogy is “broadening boys’ understandings of masculinity to be more inclusive of difference and diversity” as a way of addressing issues of power and privilege (p. 207). Perhaps, the latter statement demonstrates the importance of addressing privilege by way of incorporating mechanisms for learning that allow people to see the world through a different lens. Returning to the idea of normalization, acknowledging privilege can be a difficult task. According to Keddie (2016), educating boys on acknowledging privilege requires “expressing empathy and emotional connectedness with others” (p. 107). The idea of emotional connectedness is actually quite complex given the intersubjective character of connection which can result in miscommunication. This raises the question: how does someone of privilege relate to the concept of marginalization in a sincere and authentic way? This question perhaps still requires rigorous exploration, yet Freire’s work (see p. 55) is a strong point of departure for thinking about connection and learning.

Privilege is also an important dynamic of problematic relationships across gender that is essential to a discussion of masculinities. From my own perspective, addressing power is actually quite difficult to accomplish when it intersects with privilege insofar as privilege normalizes power in such a way that it is made invisible, or taken for granted. Therefore, connecting boys and men to social justice education requires participants to step back from their subjective perspective and look at the world in a way that makes the strange familiar, yet in a way that they can somehow personally connect with. Fostering connection also requires an analysis of where disconnection occur. First, I need to consider the diversity of individuals who embody a masculine identity.
Mills and Keddie (2007) observe that “differences amongst boys thus make it very difficult to identify a pedagogy that is appropriate for all boys” (p. 337). Therefore, educators need to account for entanglements of privilege and oppression, as not all male individuals will embody the same privileges due to racism, colonization, homophobia, and other conditions of marginalization.

Empathy is an important feature of social justice education, but also requires a willingness to engage in empathic practices. In Keddie’s research on teaching boys, she provides details of a narrative from a female-identified educator. The educator reflects on her experience of introducing feminist literature into her educational programming as a way of exploring gender roles and challenging stereotypes. What resulted were comments from students that labeled her as a “hard-core feminist” and a “Nazi feminist” (Keddie, 2007, p. 27). These types of comments minimize opportunities for empathic engagement that address privilege and promote social justice education. This raises the question: how do educators develop spaces for emotional connectedness when there is an unwillingness to do so? Furthermore, how do educators address the issues concerning masculine normalization and complacency, which I suspect, are related to the types of ignorant comments that are not only cited above, but that are also common in my own research?

Given the issue of opposition, Martino, Mills, and Lingard (2005) acknowledge the importance of challenging the dominant discourse of masculinity, which “defines the masculine in opposition to the feminine” (p. 238). It is this oppositional relationship that create barriers to emotional connectedness. Perhaps, some males see feminism or even social justice education as
a threat to their own masculine identities and perhaps this explains why male youth resist change by using derogatory language such as ‘Nazi-feminists’. Another example of this oppositional and resistant rhetoric is found in men’s rights activism (MRA), which is understood as a backlash to the broader feminist movement (Allen, 2016). The MRA movement is described as being an anti-feminist movement that is reactive, defensive and premised on “defending the rights of men” (Allan, 2016, p. 25). Opposition in the form language like ‘Nazi Feminist’, becomes a movement towards disconnection, opposition, and resistance, a movement which employs practices that are counterproductive to the goals of social justice education, and consciousness-raising campaigns. Clearly, connecting to investment in change is absent in these situations and it is important to understand why this is the case.

As I continue to formulate ways of connecting and fostering engagement, I suggest that it is important to synthesize both macro and micro approaches on the diversity of boys and men, including the way individuals experience and perceive the world. As suggested by McCusker (2016), it is essential that subjectivities are accounted for in social justice work. Perhaps, drawing from personal experience and identity affirmation are useful contributions to the pedagogy of masculinities. By encouraging a more detailed exploration of what is considered to be an identity, the result may lead to opportunities that humanize learning and build a capacity for empathy and acknowledgment of the relationship between patriarchal attitudes, violence, oppression, and identity.
Towards Humanization

Stepping back from masculinities specifically and towards the broader idea of identity may help centre some of the fundamental ontological questions of what identities do. What is important to consider is the question: why do identities matter? There are many ways to both conceptualize and theorize these ideas, yet it seems likely that these questions can be framed well by including an existential or phenomenological positioning of the Self. According to Morris (1966):

Each one of us wants to know that in some genuine sense we belong to and in the world: we want to know that our existence is justified, that we are not de trop, not excess baggage, a useless surplus in the world; we want to know that our existence is not a chance event, not an accident, not an error of some kind (p. 33, emphasis in original).

Fundamentally, if one exists then they want to arrive at some reason as to why this is the case. Being an identity is premised on the idea of being self-conscious, knowing that one is an identity for themselves and for others. Two ways through which identity can be conceptualized is through practices of humanization or dehumanization. The latter is an objectification of the Other as a way of asserting one’s own being, which alienates and distorts the being of others (Freire, 1970/1992, p. 28). The former is a method that perhaps takes the complexity and diversity of human experience seriously. Freire (1970/1992) describes humanization as a liberation of not only the oppressed, but of all people. His perspective acknowledges that the experience of oppression manifests in-itself though intersubjective relationships to self-consciousness. This can be described as intersecting forms of dehumanization, but also perhaps that in some ways being the oppressor is in itself a form of dehumanization that seeks liberation. A more detailed
discussion regarding the ontological relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed will be discussed in chapter two. At this point, I can at least determine what constitutes both oppressors and the oppressed is complex on the basis of these intersubjective positions. In the context of social change, Freire (1970/1992) observes that the violence of oppression is a “historical fact” not a human “destiny” (p. 28). This oppression manifests itself by robbing others of their own subjectivity, or imposing an identity on others on the basis of cultural, political, and historical structures that are representative of identities and the assumed social value of certain identities. Therefore, there is a need to situate theory as praxis in the human experience. Theory in-itself may have a seemingly objective status. However, in-the-world, a discourse of theory becomes entangled with human perception and diverse lived experiences. Due to these entanglements with perceptual accounts of phenomena, the clear and objective status of theory becomes less visible and messy because the world can only be known through the particularities available to one’s situation. As a result, theory should be grounded in humanistic terms. In alignment with this perspective, Sartre (1946/1970) asserts that humanism:

is the only theory which does not make man [sic] into an object. All kinds of materialism lead one to treat every man [sic] including oneself as an object—that is, a set of pre-determined reactions, in no way different from the patterns of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table, or a chair, or a stone. (p. 45)

Sartre’s use of humanism—which I would indeed extend beyond use of the term “man”—is an acknowledgement of understanding philosophy in the context of human experience. It considers one’s own situation as their truth and their understanding of the world. Sartre asserts that “man
[sic] cannot pass beyond human subjectivity” (1946/1970, p. 29). I agree with this idea because although one lives in a world that has a common understanding of cultural symbols, language, and experiences, the world is always observed from the position of the subject, looking outwards, creating an identity for themselves and also the identities of others. “There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity” (Sartre, 1946/1970, p. 55). In this sense, the world as one understands it is created through their experiences in a way that is always human.

Humanism is then a rejection of objectification and a movement towards the existential freedom described through a humanist perspective—similar to what is accounted for in Freire’s work as liberation. Both Sartre and Freire’s accounts are a departure from abstract conceptualizations of humanity and an effort towards acknowledging the experiences of people as they are given. Observing Sartre’s definition of humanism in synthesis with Freire’s liberation suggests also a requirement to move from humanism to humanization. This movement towards humanization, as I define it, is not only a conceptualization of human experience; instead, it is extended to the assurance that all human experience is valued and included in both discussions and projects that encourage social change.
Chapter 2: Ontological Orientations of Identity

My ontological discussion of masculinities studies synthesizes both the trajectory of historical theories of identity and emerging concepts in this field of research. Although it is beyond the scope of my inquiry to offer a concrete program of reform, my study does offer a strong means of reconceptualizing the ontological and methodological means by which one would talk about such concrete consequences. Of particular importance when working within a model of humanization, is the consideration of the individual context—both how people embody identities and encounter the identities of others. Therefore, a pedagogy of masculine identities requires a more general understanding of what identities are and what identities do. What has resulted from the ontological study of identity is a collection of metaphysical mechanisms used as a framework for understanding of the human experience and what it means to exist. What is found in various perspectives ranging from classical Greek philosophy to post-structuralism is diverse and often competing conceptual frameworks for understanding what constitutes an identity. Throughout the history of ontological study on identity, there are recurring thematic characteristics that also bind various perspectives together. Through my analysis of these various philosophical paradigms concerning identity, an arrival at one’s sense of self often results in the negation and the objectification of the Other. These ontological assumptions will be challenged by moving towards an understanding that is informed through multiplicities, pluralities, fluidity, and process.

Philosophical assumptions of identity fail to acknowledge that differences are assigned a social value that impacts how identity is characterized and understood. In the context of gender and sexuality, differences between masculinity, femininity, gender non-conformity, heterosexuality,
pansexuality, and homosexuality are assigned social locations that both maintain and perpetuate representational positions of privilege and oppression. These differences are conventionally understood as natural, binary, or objective knowledge claims, neglecting the fact that ontological assessments of identity are socially constructed and dependent upon other social conditions such as political discourse and cultural linguistics. A critical perspective of these assumptions suggests that perhaps differentiation itself is not the issue that maintains inequality, but rather it is the social discourses that construct and inform value claims in the context of identity differentiation.

Throughout my inquiry I will continuously return to the language of self and other, which includes specific distinctions for each term used in a particular manner. The Self represented with a capitalized ‘S’ refers to the global self as ontological or the broader notion of selfhood. Self represented with a lower case ‘s’ refers to an individual’s subjective notion of self, the individual, or specific instances of selfhood. The term Other, represented with a capitalized ‘O’ represents the global idea of otherness—or that which is not ourselves. This can be understood as those who do not share the same experiences, privileges, or social locations as other individuals, which is defined by way of multiplicities and intersections of identity such as race or gender that will be discussed throughout my inquiry. The term other represented by a lower case ‘o’ will be used to represent specific interactions between one’s self and other people, or what can be defined as specific encounters with objectification in the context of intersubjective experiences. These distinctions are useful for clarifying when I am speaking about broader ideas of gender, privilege and power or more nuanced and experiential factors and conditions of identity.
A critical review of how gender has been understood and categorized historically is helpful for understanding the pedagogical systems used to discuss masculinities. Before turning towards alternative methods that attempt to challenge problematic philosophical assumptions that are common in theories of identity, I will provide an overview of four commonly used theories called upon to conceptualize identity in the context of privilege and oppression—master-slave dialectics, plurality, intersectionality, and assemblage. Understanding how these four theories of identity have been taken up historically provides insight into the discursive nature of identity politics found in social justice rhetoric. What results from my exploration, is an opportunity to evaluate the conceptual ability of these theories to accommodate for intersubjective learning and humanization in the context of emancipatory projects and social change. What my analysis may also provide is an opportunity to understand how masculinities could be represented as both self-affirmative while also providing a critical understanding of hierarchical social conditions. In other words, it takes up the question of whether masculinities can be re-cast or re-crafted in post-dialectical, humanizing, and liberating terms.

**Dialectical Ontology**

Contemporary ontological understandings of identity owe a great deal to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s theory of master-slave dialectics. Indeed, the relationship between subjects and self-consciousness is a primary concern for an exploration of identity and both these ontological considerations are central to Hegel’s work. To grasp what makes Hegel’s work valuable, it is important to understand how it relates to the work of Immanuel Kant. “For both Kant and Hegel, self-consciousness is the key to all knowledge” (Soloman, 1987, p. 7). Kant’s work posits a theory of knowledge in the abstract, whereas Hegel’s work is about how knowledge is situated in
the world (Soloman, 1987). For Kant, objects or the thing-in-themselves are independent from human observations. Kant proposes that self-consciousness is projected from the human subject towards objects in the observable world (Ficara, 2009). One cannot know a thing-in-itself directly, but instead must know it through the lens of human experience as observation of the world and the limits of knowledge and language within these conditions. By contrast, Hegel observes the conditions of the human experience are in a constant state of flux similar to the philosophy of Heraclitus (Ficara, 2009). Hegel’s theories are premised on change and relationality of multiple self-consciousnesses to one another and how they relate to both acute and historical conditions of society. In agreement with Hegel, one must not separate the discourse of history from the structures of knowledge. My primary focus on Hegel’s work is on the master-slave theory as a method of identity recognition. I also recognize that Hegel’s work is widely critiqued, difficult to interpret and includes many complexities and interpretations that are most definitely far beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Hegel’s theories are helpful for understanding how identities work in relation to one another.

In Hegelian dialectics, self-consciousness is fundamentally understood as an oppositional relationship between two separate experiences of consciousness. Hegel observes this relational positioning of power as the “master-slave dialectical relationship” (1807/1954, p. 403). For Hegel, positions of power are legitimized because the master identity can assert its position of self-consciousness through expressions of differentiating the Other. However, this practice is dependent on one having something or someone to exert their self-consciousness towards or against, the latter of which Hegel identifies as the slave position.
What Hegel’s (1807/1954) dialectical positioning observes is the process through which a subject affirms their ontological status of being in relation to the self-consciousness of the Other. This affirmation is achieved through activities of differentiation utilizing the subject and object distinction, and often resulting in both negation and objectification as means of situating one’s position of affirmed self-consciousness. The mechanism of dialectics characterizes what distinguishes what is and what is not through a methodology of relational ontologies. This can be understood as a temporal and ongoing activity through stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Rather than a static arrangement, dialectics is situated in continuous and ongoing relationships. According to Ficara (2009):

Hegel was the philosopher who firstly showed that the historical and human processes of creating philosophical concepts are moments or parts of the concept in itself, so they coincide with the concept itself and can be considered moments and processes of its self-position. (p. 93)

Therefore, the experience of making concepts is part of the concept itself, which I would add are constantly shifting in relation to their cultural and historical context.

Hegel’s dialectics can also be understood as an *inter-subjective* process, premised on the interdependency of multiple embodiments of self-consciousness. According to Hegel (1807/1954), and given the primacy of the principle of relationality in his work, “action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both” (p. 402). Hegel’s argument suggests that achieving a state of self-consciousness not based
on the status of independent self-consciousness “but rather a dependent consciousness that has been achieved” (p. 406). He goes on to posit the slave position as “the unessential consciousness… [which is] …for the master, the object which embodies the truth of his certainty of himself” (p. 406). This perspective provides insight into why affirming one’s own subjectivity results in the objectification of others and how the activity of affirming one’s self-consciousness is a continuous project. What is perceived as inter-subjectivity is perhaps in bad faith, and objectification of the Other is a loss of one’s subjectivity by way of the status of being an object. Importantly, Hegel argues for this process of differentiation as being both negative and oppositional.

What is lacking in Hegel’s approach to a theory of identity is a method for justifying the assumptions that the status of an object is inherently negative. “Hegel seems to put difference at the heart of being” but also takes his assertion a step further and “transforms difference into an opposition” (Ficara, 2009, p. 91). Through my reading of Hegel, limited information is available regarding how the measurement of the Other’s value is determined in this process, yet I am inclined to suggest that this has something do to with Hegel’s emphasis on changes to historical conditions through time. Perhaps, the negative is legitimized in the socially constructed processes through which self-consciousness is understood, acknowledging knowledge acquisition as related to being-in-the-world. Butler (2010) reflects on what is described by Hegel as “ausser sich” or “coming out of one’s self” (p. 74); here the knowledge of one’s self is situated in relation to others, but also in relation to the world. Her reflection provides a basis for identifying the philosophical assumptions found in Hegel’s work. She argues that if the meaning assigned to relationships of consciousness is constructed externally then one’s epistemology of
identity cannot be abstracted from social, cultural, and linguistic systems used to signify one’s relationship to the world and to knowledge (Butler, 2010). Perhaps, Hegel is not wrong in his observation of the commonality of oppositional relationships, yet he fails to prove that this negative representation of the Other is a universally ontological process rather than a socially constructed value claim that inaccurately becomes naturalized in an attempt to conceptualize self-consciousness.

According to Hegel, differentiation is conceptualized as being inherently negative. This posits the master and slave in their situations of inequality that are dependent on the exploitation of another’s status of self-consciousness. For Hegel, the slave is not only the relational to the master, but the slave is also absorbed by the master position (1807/1954). That is, the slave position is robbed of its own subjectivity and absorbed by the self-consciousness of the master. The slave’s own self-consciousness is also dependent on the relationship of the master. This results in a synthesis which is a mutual recognition of ontological interdependency. Or as argued by Hegel both master and slave “recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one other” (p. 401). The role of the Other in the recognition of the Self comes with the anxiety of acknowledging that one’s concept of self is realized outside of one’s self and how the desire to affirm one’s own consciousness results in the objectification of others.

From Hegel’s perspective, the status of self-consciousness is always premised on exploitation and any metaphysical alternative of the Self is either unavailable or unrecognized (Arel, 2013). According to Hegel (1954/1807):
Self-consciousness is primarily simple, being-by-itself, self identity by exclusion of every other from itself. It takes its essential nature and absolute object to be Ego; and in this immediacy, in the bare fact of its self-existence, it is individual. That which for it is the other stands as unessential object, as object with the impress and character of negation. (p.401)

For Hegel, negation or exclusion of the Other’s subjectivity seems to be the immediate method for arriving at a sense of self-actualization. It is through the master’s position of power over and, a process of assigning a negative value to the Other, that the master affirms their sense of selfness. Nevertheless, that which is not represented by the ‘I’ is believed to be, and perhaps in bad faith, an inescapable status of the slave’s exploitation and the object of the ego for the master position.

Beauvoir reminds us of the exploitative dimension of dialectical reasoning insofar as asserting one’s subjectivity is hostile in relation to the subjectivity of others. Through a Hegelian lens, Beauvoir (1949/2011) observes that “we find consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself [sic] up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object” (p. 7). She goes on to suggest that nobody volunteers to be an object, and that instead this status is assigned in relation to hierarchies of domination based on perceived social value through the systems of both normative discourse and epistemology (1949/2011). For instance, the authority to demonstrate social dominance is often used as a metric for organizing who should belong where in the organization of social hierarchies. Domination, as socially constructed and in relation to
social values, is used to legitimize social inequality and exclusion. Ironically, the unessential object is in fact, essential in the process of self-recognition and carries with that a subversive power dynamic situated in resistance (Foucault, 1976/1988). What may not be essential is the practice of negation which is naturalized as a hostile act of navigating intersubjective relationships. The mistake is assuming the oppositional relationship is an ontological requirement rather than a product of socially constructed iterations of difference.

How power manifests itself as a force in relationships between individuals has important implications for the goals of emancipatory action, especially if change is merely a reconfigured representation in dialectical opposition. If social change is meant to disrupt complacency to inequality, then the a priori status of negation must also be addressed. Grant (2010) observes that “if the subject is an effect of power through and through, then those who pursue liberation have misrecognized what they desire: a different construction and writing of the subject rather than the freeing of an existing but dominated one” (p. 233). Grant’s reflection—and the potential for re-conceptualizing social marginalization—has critical implications for emancipatory projects. Indeed, one should be concerned that a mere reconfiguration of dialectical relationships may not be accomplishing much in the way of transforming social relationships, and instead, is a reiteration of the epistemological assumptions found in Hegel’s dialectical logic. Furthermore, the organization of power in Hegel’s notion of synthesis is premised on the capacity of change with temporal implications (1807/1954). Therefore, power is a “shifting and precarious” force, and its substance constitutes both multiplicity and change that contradict the notion of a singular and fixed subject-object distinction (Grant, 2010, p. 228). From my perspective, dialectical reason as a method of epistemology may be difficult to refute, but perhaps, dialectical
relationships are better understood as nuanced multiplicities rather than being singular and polarizing dualisms.

Returning to the use of masculinities in place of masculinity, as discussed in the previous chapter, recognizes that individuals navigate multiple subjectivities. Even if these relationships are dialectical, one is likely experiencing the conditions of multiple dialectical conditions simultaneously. If the goal of emancipatory efforts is to validate the experiences of diverse subjectivities then it could be said that “the primary task of radical politics is the creation of new subjectivities” (Grant, 2010, p. 233). This perspective demonstrates that the creation of new subjectivities accommodates the necessary agency required to affirm one’s perceived sense of self in a way that perhaps can achieve movement towards a more authentic intersubjective understanding of difference. This assertion suggests that a subject will likely have to navigate multiple ‘micro-dialectical relationships’ within the conditions of embodying multiple identities simultaneously.

Another widely critiqued philosophical assumption found in Hegel’s dialectical concept is equating relational with oppositional while failing to recognize that differentiation can also be qualified as affirmative as taken up by intersecting critiques offered by Nietzsche (1873/1976); Deleuze (1962/2006); and Butler (1987, 2010). As cited by Ficara (2009), “Nietzsche’s philosophy involves—according to Deleuze—a radical reversal of the Hegelian position: instead of levelling difference on opposition, Nietzsche interprets difference as affirmation; instead of magnifying the sadness of the negative, he defends the enjoyment of the affirmation” (p. 92). Ficara (2009) goes on to say “if we assume the standpoint of difference without reducing it to
opposition, we see that difference becomes affirmation and originates a completely new
movement” (p. 92). Indeed, Hegel assumes that differentiation is negative in its characterization,
yet it is unclear to me if the negative is meant to be understood as socially constructed or at the
heart of ontological being. If the negative is constructed through knowledge rather than
naturalized, then one has the choice to conceptualize the Other without utilizing oppositional
qualities.

Butler’s work has also examined the primacy of oppositional relationships as a response to
Hegel’s use of negation by suggesting the possibility for a movement towards a “productive and
generative activity” (1987, p. 205). She argues that “negativity, the lack of characteristics of
desire, is instituted through ideological means in order to rationalize a social situation of
hierarchy or domination” (p. 206). Perhaps then, it is not the differentiation itself that is the
problem, but rather the epistemological assumptions that inform a socio-cultural understanding
of domination and subordination. Of particular importance—and from a Nietzschean
perspective—affirmation of identity is also a project which must consider the implications of
agency and will.

Nietzsche’s critique of Hegelian dialectics includes will, affirmation, and the philosophical
assumption of the negative character of beingness. Nietzsche’s critique is taken up concisely by
Deleuze in their combined reflections on Hegel’s philosophy of dialectics. What both Nietzsche
and Deleuze offer is a different perspective for assessing difference, moving towards the
positive, and a human-centered ontological understanding of differences—or at least an
epistemological shift towards how differences are assigned social value. Deleuze observes that:
In Nietzsche the essential relation of one force to another is never conceived as a negative element in the essence. In its relation with the other the force which makes itself obeyed does not deny the other or that which it is not, it affirms its own difference and enjoys this difference. The negative is not present in the essence as that from which force draws its activity: on the contrary it is a result of activity, of the existence of an active force and the affirmation of its difference. (1962/2006, pp. 8-9)

In relation to Deleuze’s argument, Butler (1987) argues that Nietzsche’s concept of will to power “provides an alternative model of desire which is based on the plenitude of life, its incessant fertility, rather than the negativity of self-consciousness” (p. 212). In agreement with Butler (1987); Deleuze (1962/2006); Ficara (2009); and Nietzsche (1873/1976); I acknowledge the possibility of conceptualizing an understanding of difference through a positive lens. Indeed, Hegel’s work on master-slave cannot account for oppositional ontological experiences without accounting for the socially constructed epistemologies that inform oppositional practices of differentiation. Hegel’s assumption of the negative is important to address insofar as one can witness these practices in political discourse and as a barrier to social change.

Also in support of critiquing Hegel’s dialectical model is Freire’s work on radical pedagogy, liberation, and social change, which demonstrates how a movement away from dialectical epistemology may be useful in the development of non-binary emancipatory practices (1970/1992). He observes this movement as necessary because dialectical analysis limits the role of agency and the nuances of subjective experience—both from the position of the oppressor and
the oppressed (Freire, 1970/1992). Therefore, if conventional social discourses continue the use of a dialectical epistemology to understand both one’s ontological position and social relations of power, one is likely going to repeat similar styles of oppositional hierarchies which are conceptualized as resistance, but remain structurally fixated as an assumed negativity towards the Other. As argued by Freire (1970/1992), freedom from a dialectical relationship is achieved when it is “superseded by humanization” (pp. 33-34). He understands humanization as disempowering the dialectical relationship itself, and moving towards a different method for understanding difference. Difference through this lens is not premised on the negativity of difference; rather, on both the diversity of knowledge and perceptual accounts of lived experience.

The movement towards humanizing knowledge raises the question: what can humanization achieve as a movement away from dialectical reasoning? Freire (1970/1992) challenges all people to “increase the scope of their perception” (p. 70) insofar as re-orientating our understanding of oppressor-oppressed dialectical relationships. From my perspective, it is not necessarily the dialectical relationship in-itself which is the issue. In fact, I would challenge Freire’s critique of dialectical thinking by suggesting that he may have overlooked the intention of Hegel’s concept of synthesis as a possible departure from oppositional negatives. What I do suggest, is the view held by Hegel in bad faith, is the idea that negative representation of the Other is inherently a condition of self-actualization. However, this does not suggest that humanization is not a goal worth pursuing.

Increasing the scope of one’s perception as an act towards humanization can be taken up in at
least three useful ways. First, one can acknowledge the diverse lived experiences of people by way of understanding identity as something that includes experiential or phenomenological characteristics and an ontological desire to make sense of one’s individual existence (Morris, 1966, p.33). This can be understood as an attunement to what an individual knows based on the the relationship between experience and knowledge. Second, humanization is the shift to situated knowledge and employs analytical strategies that account for what is in view or what is in reach of the subject, a topic that will be covered in depth in Chapter Three. This suggests that change begins from where one finds themselves, which is also a point of departure for learning. As a pedagogical tool, this can help educators gain a better understanding of ignorance and complacency as barriers to meaningful social change. Finally, Freire (1970/1992) observes that liberation from oppressive relationships requires an ontological shift for both the oppressor and the oppressed; therefore, requiring a complete reconfiguration of how relationships to power and the selfhood are understood in the context of emancipatory change. This reconfiguration may provide opportunities to differentiate without resorting to oppositional or negative qualifiers. Instead, humanization requires the ability to work across diverse perspectives and experiences, and this is why humanization is an essential characteristic of change towards equity and away from exclusion. Indeed, this requires a new way of understanding the position and significance of the Other.

Masculine Plurality

In Chapter One, I introduced Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity as an anchor for exploring how the topic of masculinities is taken up broadly within the field of gender studies. This is in conjunction with a recognition that masculinities are constituted in diverse ways
leading to hierarchical categories of masculinity within the seemingly homogeneous masculine group (Connell, 2005). Although I will not explicitly cover all modes of masculinities accounted for in Connell’s work, I will demonstrate that Connell’s categories are not exhaustive and do not account for intersections of maleness such as race, ability, or sexual orientation.

Connell’s first category is the connection between masculinity, socio-economic status, and violence. Connell describes this particular constitution of masculinity as “protest masculinity”, borrowing from Adler’s psychoanalytical theory of masculinity (2005, p. 11). Broadly speaking, the psychoanalytic perspective argues that masculinity is formed in relation to being in a perceived position of powerlessness and a desire to assert one’s own ego—or a fulfillment of one’s ontological need for affirmation of self-consciousness (Connell, 2005). In the context of Connell’s work, protest masculinity can be characterized as gender expressions that are preformed by men of working-class or low-income backgrounds with limited economic mobility. Connell (2005) describes this phenomenon as reflecting the actions of males who are “making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power” (p. 111). According to Connell, expressions of masculinity from a marginalized position often involve activities such as crime, homophobia, and coping through substance use (2005). From this perspective, one’s masculinity is measured in relation to one’s ability to demonstrate the embodiment of the dominant position within masculine hierarchies. Second, one’s perceived position of powerlessness influences the way masculinities are performed. Connecting socio-economic status to masculinity acknowledges that masculinities subjectivities are also constructed through other intersections of life circumstance and experiences, outside of, but in relation to, gender signifiers. Therefore, how
males measure their masculine status is perhaps informed through their perceived ability to assert dominance through various socially constructed measures.

Another classification of masculinity that is described by Connell is complacency. According to Connell (2005), many men have no explicit reason to challenge patriarchy because of what they can gain personally by maintaining the subordination of women. Connell (2005) describes these social privileges or benefits as the “patriarchal dividend” (p. 79). Complacency describes men who would not typically demonstrate overtly toxic or violent displays of masculinity and would likely pass as a ‘typical or average guy’. Complacency is a subversive feature of maintaining patriarchal norms and legitimizes gender relations that lead to the marginalized status of other genders and less masculine men. Complacency is a critical barrier for men to mobilize with the intent of challenging both toxic and hegemonic masculinity. With this in mind, what motivates people to become involved in change projects also may need to be considered personally advantageous or somehow self-affirming in order to transition from exposure to information towards the embodiment of knowledge.

Perhaps something Connell overlooks is the idea that an embodiment of privilege and marginalization can be experienced simultaneously within one individual’s identity. This results not only in a multiplicity of identities, but also potential conflicts within one’s sense of identity. Connell’s work identifies multiple variations of masculinities from diverse social locations, yet Connell argues that male privilege can be found throughout these various pluralities. As an example, Connell (2005) suggests the status of “the very straight gay” (p. 160) as someone who would perpetuate patriarchal values—sometimes taken up as the exclusion of women and other
genders in their communities—but who is also marginalized on the basis of their sexual orientation. The performance of “the very straight gay” is observed by Connell as a “closure of the sexual field” (p. 160) through which sometimes gay men build their communities exclusively around other gay men. From my perspective, this suggests that even masculine identities that are considered distant from hegemonic masculinity uphold a patriarchal social order. According to Connell “[t]here is no open challenge to the gender order” (p. 161) and instead there is a complex relationship with both oppression and power. What results is a de-facto exclusionary subculture for individuals outside of the masculine and homosexual orientation, and from Connell’s perspective, is a continuation of misogynistic practices within masculine-centred gay communities.

Connell’s concept of plurality is a demonstration of how masculinities are situated within different points in patriarchy, yet contribute to maintaining this structure in different ways. Reinforcement of the status quo often presents in ways that are normalized, invisible, or sometimes unintentional. Regardless of intention, a patriarchal hierarchy of power is still perpetuated and maintained on the premise of exclusion. With these considerations in mind, I have a few questions regarding the operation of power: how should I account for gender hierarchies as cardinal to relationships of power and how should queerness be situated in terms of oppression? Am I required to use gender relationships as a starting point for critical identity analysis if other points of marginalization have distinctive and crucial perspectives to offer?

Beauvoir centralizes much of her critique of gender relations as being produced and maintained through intertwined structures of capitalist and patriarchal epistemology (1949/2011). Prioritizing gender in an analysis of oppression may be an oversimplification of how oppression
works and risks prioritizing one form of oppression over another. Facing discrimination for being queer, a trans-male, or living in extreme poverty can also be valid conditions of oppression. Here, one is challenged with the task of deciding who is considered the oppressed and who is considered the oppressor and by extension deciding if some forms of oppression are more severe than others. When contemplating these sorts of questions, I am aware that we are met with the same challenges of divisiveness that present themselves in a dialectical understanding of othering. In particular, I am faced with the question: what qualifiers are used to signify the Other?

One must also consider the phenomenological constitution of masculinities. The lived experience of masculinities is precarious and nuanced in ways that cannot be conceptualized as a totality through representational social identities. Moller (2007) critiques Connell’s work by arguing that “if we abandon the logic of patterns we might begin to see that the practices on Connell’s list are actually quite different and more complex than the notion of hegemonic masculinity as an exercise in domination allows” (p. 270). Moller goes on to say that oversimplifying what constitutes gender identity suggests “a preconceived model of power and identity to the messy complexity of real people’s lives; an attribution which has the effect of obscuring the complexity of how people experience and perform both gender and power, and much else besides” (p. 270). What is essential to unpack in Moller’s critique is the statement “messy complexity”. As discussed in the section on dialectics, much of the conceptual work that is done on gender aims to essentialize, negate, and simplify. Perhaps this tendency towards simplicity is an attempt to provide clarity, which may be appealing; nevertheless, this position is not necessarily accurate. As an alternative, messiness has the potential to increases the scope of perception; it makes
unfamiliar possibilities available, it is process oriented, and it is generative. Making space for messiness is perhaps part of what is necessary for a shift towards humanization.

Acknowledging messiness suggests that oppressive forces of masculinities are also part of the ideological domination of westernization, colonization, and capitalism in relation to patriarchy. Through a Foucauldian lens, power and knowledge are intertwined (1975/1995). Therefore, knowledge is constructed and iterated through the power of ideology which sustains a certain social order. Perhaps, it would even be a mistake to essentialize any of these ideological forces in themselves. Instead, ideological structures reinforce and maintain each other. People could view themselves in relation to these structures from a place where the concept of selfhood is messy, intertwined, and intersecting in complex social and discursive networks. Messiness is not described here as dualism between chaos and order; rather, it is meant to demonstrate the importance of particularities in a world where the human experience of phenomena is integrated with a myriad of intertwined structures of power and knowledge. These intertwined structures are also entangled with the particularities of subjective human experience. A theory of humanism accounts for these intricacies. Chapter Three will explores subjectivities as a form of humanization more in depth; however, I continue this discussion on the premise that perception and socialization are entangled in a complex relationship.

**Intersectional Identities**

Kimberlé Crenshaw is often credited as the first theorist to propose a conceptual framework of intersectionality. Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality contributes something incredibly significant to how the relationship between power and representational identity is understood in
both a legal and sociological context. Puar (2012) observes that, “numerous feminist thinkers consider intersectionality the dominant paradigm through which feminist theory has analyzed difference” (p. 49). Crenshaw’s method of demonstrating intersectionality is informed through the kind of arguments made and decisions imposed on legal discourse concerning sexual assault cases, specifically cases that involve individuals who are both women and also people of colour. Crenshaw (1991) observes that “women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women” (p. 1252). Intersections of sexism and racism provide a means of measuring how critical race theory or feminist theory cannot independently capture the specific oppressive circumstances of black women and their relationship to the American legal system. As argued by Crenshaw (1989) “Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men” (p. 149). Crenshaw (1989) uses the analogy of a traffic intersection to explain how intersectionality is conceptualized by stating that:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (p. 149)

This analogy is useful for demonstrating various points of oppression that may be experiences by an individual simultaneously. More recently, intersectionality has a broader application including
determinants of oppression such as: age, race, ability, sexual orientation, gender and various other signifiers of identity. In general, Crenshaw (1989) observes that intersectionality is a method for moving away from a “single-axis analysis” which risks reducing experiences of privilege and oppression to a dualistic structure (p. 140).

Intersectionality theory is effective at creating space for a concept of oppression that is both hierarchical and pluralistic simultaneously. It provides a more nuanced understanding of oppression insofar as acknowledging that multiple oppressions are intertwined and each cannot be reduced to one form of oppression over the other. From my perspective, intersectionality is a superior form of Connell’s work on pluralism to the extent that it recognizes the significance of accounting for multiplicities within a social group; however, intersectionality expands upon Connell’s work in that it accounts for the ways in which identities converge with factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability as intersections of marginalization.

One must also acknowledge the limitations of intersectionality by not oversimplifying what defines or constitutes a group of people or a homogenous community. Crenshaw acknowledges the contradictory implications of intersectional analysis as both “a source of strength, community, and intellectual development”, yet at the same time a theory that “conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1991, p. 1242). She argues that “intersectionality is not being offered here as some new, totalizing theory of identity. Nor do I [Crenshaw] mean to suggest that violence against women of color can be explained only through the specific frameworks of race and gender considered here” (p. 1244). Crenshaw’s reflections in “Mapping the Margins” caution her audience that a comprehensive understanding of identity will likely not be satisfied
by a singular framework, not even her own theoretical work (1991). Therefore, intersectionality may be best suited to signify and speak to representational identities without assuming that intersectionality can account for one’s identity in any comprehensive manner.

This issue relates to the same oppositional epistemology found in dialectics insofar as difference is regulated through acts of negation towards the Other. Crenshaw (1991) suggests that “intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (p. 1296). However, and as praxis,intersectional analysis has perhaps amplified aspects of these tensions within and across social groups. Specifically, and in the context of political mobilization, it is difficult to decide who gets to be the voice of women insofar as recognizing other forms of oppression such as colonization, transphobia, homophobia, and racism.

The International Women’s March that took place the day after Donald Trump’s inauguration as President of the United States of America is a good example of how the ‘voice of women’ becomes complicated in relation to intersectional oppression. The march was promoted as a collective act of resistance in response to regressive right wing policies proposed by Trump’s administration that would infringe on women’s rights (Stockman, 2017). In a New York Times article titled: “Women’s March on Washington Opens Contentious Dialogues About Race,” organizers expressed their opinions about who is best suited to take on leadership roles for this event. The article provides multiple subjective reports, and the questions raised from event organizers demonstrate how intersectional accounts of racism and sexism impact the ability to mobilize collectively against oppression. As demonstrated below, there are diverse perspectives on how one should be able to participate in social justice activities and what types of roles are
appropriate for certain types of people to take on. This raises two important questions that are accounted for in the narratives of event organizers: first, should some intersections of marginalization be prioritized over others, and second how does one determine who is the most appropriate person to define or speak for the perspective of an oppressed group?

The Louisiana state march coordinator Candice Huber, states that “I got a lot of flak locally when I stepped down, from white women who said that I’m alienating a lot of white women… They said, why do you have to be so divisive?” A New Jersey woman confirmed this observation and reported that she was “starting to feel not very welcome in this endeavor” (Stockman, 2017). As reported by the New York Times event organizers also explicitly commented on how white privilege needs to be accounted for in the organization of the event. ShiShi Rose, a 27-year-old blogger from Brooklyn asserted that “now is the time for you to be listening more, talking less…I needed them [white women] to understand that they don’t just get to join the march and not check their privilege constantly” (Stockman, 2017). This published blog post actually informed one participant’s decision not to attend the event. This is not to suggest that ShiShi Rose’s opinion is somehow wrong. In fact, it is an accurate assessment of how certain voices are often silenced or marginalized— which I consider a completely legitimate concern. A question worth considering is: in what way would it be appropriate for white women to participate in the Women’s March acknowledging that many white women might also experience sexism? Even if one was to prioritize certain forms of marginalization over others: who is most suitable to evaluate these claims, and can constructing rigid hierarchies of oppression inform an effective framework for social justice? Based on these questions, I arrive at the same problem found in the
dialectical model of insofar as utilizing negation or opposition as a way of hierarchizing and regulating multiple forms of oppression.

Practices that assign difference as oppositional—as found in dialectics and intersectionality alike—suggests that emancipatory efforts may fall into the same patterns of excluding the Other. Intersectionality does not necessarily provide the generative and self-affirming understanding of difference that both Nietzsche (1873/1976) and Deleuze (1962/2006) suggested as an alternative to negative ontological positioning. It is interesting to witness the power of discourse in action as Crenshaw’s work is projected forward into everyday political discourse, yet the philosophical limitations she identified in her own work—and that I cited previously—seem to be left out of these conversations. Paradoxically, advocates for social justice are simultaneously de-centering the dominant discourse, yet contributing to the formation divisive identity politics within what is seemingly meant to be collective action towards change.

To better understand why hierarchical representations assessment of identities are problematic, I turn to the idea of queerness and disrupt the idea that signifiers such as race, gender, and sexual orientation in themselves create an incomplete assessment of identity embodiment. Let’s consider the significance of the signifier LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-Gender, and Queer) that is used commonly as an identifier for gender and sexual orientations—an identifier that also has many variations, additions, and abbreviations. More specifically, I am unpacking the significance of the word ‘queer’ as understood among different LGBTQ communities.
The linguistic significance of the word *queer* is tangled in a paradox. It signifies what can be either derogatory or affirming based on how one is situated in relation to this word. It is sometimes used in the affirmative, as an intentional resistance to gender norms and an act of dissent (Mizzi and Walton, 2014). For others who identify as LGBT, queer signifies a derogatory term that limits access for those wanting to assimilate towards normative culture (Mizzi and Walton, 2014). These contrasting iterations of the word queer posit the word in a contradictory and precarious space, disrupting the idea that LGBTQ can accurately be represented as one cohesive community. Defining this community as singular misidentifies the diversity that comes with the lived experience of being queer and also the needs of LGBT(Q) community members.

Not only are there complications in defining what constitutes a group identity, there are also complexities within the multiplicities embodied by each individual. As a specific example, I would like to examine the experience of whiteness, maleness, and queerness as embodied by one individual. Frank Bruni (2017) published an editorial in the *New York Times* titled “I’m a White Man. Hear Me Out”. Bruni opens the editorial by stating:

> I’m a white man, so you should listen to absolutely nothing I say, at least on matters of social justice. I have no standing. No way to relate. My color and gender nullify me, and it gets worse: I grew up in the suburbs. Dad made six figures. We had a backyard pool… But wait. I’m gay. And I mean gay from a different, darker day. In that pool and at that school, I sometimes quaked inside, fearful of what my future held. (para. 1)
This narrative raises questions of how to determine a marginalized status for those who are at the intersection of both oppressor and oppressed. Bruni (2017) asks the question “So where does that leave me? Who does that make me? Oppressor or oppressed? Villain or victim? And does my legitimacy hinge on the answer” (para. 3). On the one hand, Bruni’s social position of privilege may perpetuate Western colonial, androcentric worldviews. On the other hand, how do we account for the marginalization that Bruni may experience as identifying as a member of the LGBT(Q) community? Again, the semiotic character of the signifier ‘queer’ is up for debate and the legitimacy of a subordinate status hinges on a socially understood collection of multiple identities. Nevertheless, the internalized sense of one’s oppressed status may also come with oppressive features for others. For example, Connell’s (2005) category of the very straight gay suggests that some queer male communities actually exclude feminine-identified people from their communities and social lives, which in turn perpetuates patriarchal social structures. Therefore, queerness in the context of multiplicities of oppression comes with its own contradictions.

What intersectionality does well is determine various points of oppression and privilege within an individual. However, intersectional analysis cannot explicitly assess the ability to prioritize one form of oppression over another in any empirical or objective formulation—at least not at this point in our shared political culture. Public discourse—as seen in the example of the women’s march—does tend to make these sorts of hierarchal distinctions. The idiom “oppression olympics” has appeared in mainstream culture to explore what constitutes the ‘prioritization’ of marginalization. Use of the term “oppression olympics” (Yuval-Davis, 2012, p. 52), implies that there is a hierarchy of social locations as categorized on the basis of
intersectional oppressions. Although I cannot locate a specific origin of this term, it is spoken about from various perspectives through diverse forms of media and discussion of social issues (Yuval-Davis, 2012). Returning to the issue of opposition, the idiom “oppression olympics” works through the assumption that the most oppressed voice may also be the most legitimate voice (Yuval-Davis, 2012). This seems to make some sense, until one attempts to determine which form of oppression is actually the ‘most oppressive’. For example, could one suggest that racialized individuals are more oppressed than LGBTQ individuals, but how could one justify that conclusion without speaking for the experience of others? I am not convinced that this sort of fixed distinction is useful for improving social relationships across difference, nor is there the means to justify these types of assessments in any absolutist manner. Furthermore, I am unsure how one would assert exactly how multiplicities of identity can be accounted for in the context of power and the social representation of identities.

Yuval-Davis (2012) goes on to say that there is a tendency for social change advocates to become the voice of authority for their communities. Aligning with Yuval-Davis’s argument suggests that the discourse found in resistance-based communities is not immune to problematizing hierarchical epistemologies of identity. What is lacking is generative practices that destabilize the centrality of leadership and the authority of certain people to define the relationship between oppression and identity. Indeed, these assumptions made through resistance-based discourse can lead the same issues of negative representation found in Hegel’s dialectical model that contribute to oppressive relationships in the first place.
In reflection, I am curious of the value of reconstructing hierarchical distinctions as a movement towards an equitable future. Or perhaps, could diversity be acknowledged beyond being oppositional as a precarious and de-centered concept? Indeed, precarity is ever-present in social relations, especially in the context of social structures and representational identities and perhaps acknowledging the precarity of identities has both ontological and pedagogical value (Butler, 2006). I would add that precarity does not necessarily need to be conceptualized as a nihilistic space. Instead, precarity can be accounted for when one takes a reflexive approach to an epistemology of identity, breaking away from rigid systemic classifications, and acknowledging multiplicity as a generative practice that requires rigorous and ongoing evaluation. Considering these possibilities allows one to explore the nuances of identity construction grounded in reflexive practices and orientated towards process rather than outcome.

Towards Assemblage

Challenging the literature on identity that I have presented thus far does not necessarily require a cynical response. Instead, one can re-orientate the goal of attempting to define identity rather than resorting to skepticism or denigration. One possible re-orientation could be shifting the function of conceptual projects from outcomes to processes. Perhaps, the use of assemblage is a shift in emphasis, able to demonstrate the importance of what identities do rather than fixating explicitly on what identities are (Puar, 2012). As a possibility for future conceptualizations of masculinities, I present a discussion that explores what work is done prior to arriving at a given identity, what is found between point A and point B. A fruitful deployment of this method begins with the concepts introduced by Deleuze and Guattari as assemblages and the principles that build the segments of assemblages represented as rhizomes (1980/2016). From my perspective,
rhizomes and assemblages are not conceptually defined in themselves; rather rhizomes are defined through the methods that they inform.

Broadly speaking, assemblages are capable of establishing a reflexive approach to understanding identity. The structure of the concept itself does not necessarily negate previous theories of identity, but instead expands the possibilities of the work that they can do. Assemblages also accommodate a synthesis of historical perspectives and possibilities for the future; they are not premised on arriving at a particular outcome from a particular place. For instance, one is not required to make a choice between intersectionality and assemblages. Puar (2012) argues that:

> there are different conceptual problems posed by each; intersectionality attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration, while assemblages, in an effort to reintroduce politics into the political, asks what is prior to and beyond what gets established.

(p. 63)

It is also productive to reflect on the historical considerations that inform the chosen method of analysis. There is the potential for assemblage, as a method, to disrupt Western, binary, and androcentric methodological systems and ways of thinking that are often attributed to perpetuating patriarchal epistemological structures (Connell, 2005). My movement towards the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s work aligns with feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1993), who suggests that rhizome theory has the possibility of challenging binary logic as a way of thinking and which has “exerted domination in
Western philosophy since the time of Plato” (p. 169). Both Grosz and Puar have established that assemblage has the potential for emancipatory application echoing the methodological shift in the design of philosophical practices.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016), assemblage theory was “created precisely in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state” (p. 32). Its objective is to redirect one’s attention to process, rather than fixating on totalizing and rigid categorizations and forms, making decisions between the social and the personal, the metaphysical and the material. Instead, all of these aspects of human existence can be brought into view through process.

In the opening paragraphs of Deleuze and Guattari’s work: A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, the book’s organization is itself presented as an assemblage. Clarity is not something readily available to their audience. Perhaps, A Thousand Plateaus was crafted in this manner intentionally, and the pages of the book serve as an example of incomplete thoughts, ruptures in explanations, and contradictions within concepts themselves. My interpretation of the format of A Thousand Plateaus is that Deleuze and Guattari themselves encourage their audience to engage with the book in a non-linear way, and potentially a linear approach to reading it would be missing its point entirely (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2016). Even procuring a definitive explanation of what defines assemblage is difficult because that information is scattered across chapters, and often obscurely presented in unclear and ambiguous terms (DeLanda, 2006; Miller, 2013).
This organization of ideas may not matter as much as one may think, and to concern one’s self with this issue may be assuming that assemblage is meant to be a specific model aiming to achieve a certain outcome. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari’s work is situated in process, exploring relationships rather than arrival at an outcome. Puar (2012) suggests that assemblage can be a misunderstood translation of the word “agencement”, which means “design, layout, organization, arrangement, and relations… The focus being not on content but on relations, relations of patterns” (p. 57). What assemblage offers is a way of mapping what is to be included in an area of study broadly, and specifically in my research this could be useful for mapping out the relationship between socio-political structures and perceptual accounts of masculinities.

The process of mapping is the activity of constructing assemblages premised on accounting for multiplicities that exist within and among structures. Deleuze and Guattari are careful to assert a difference between mapping and tracing. They suggest that tracing neutralizes “the multiplicities according to the axes of signification and subjectification belonging to it… when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2016, p. 13). Aligning with this perspective, tracing is a replication of what already exists. Tracing can be applied in useful ways, but is fixated on understanding what is already there rather than what is possible. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016) describe how a map is distinct from tracing, observing that a “map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (p. 12). Therefore, mapping is about process whereas tracing is is more specifically for identifying content.
Reflexive thinking is compatible with both process orientated conceptualizations and productive possibilities. Grosz (1993) asserts that mapping practices are “concerned with what can be done, how texts, concepts, and subjects can be put to work, made to do things, making new linkages” (p. 174). Beyond experimentation, I suggest assemblages help situate where the movement from the past and the present is taking ideas towards the future. It can help one to understand where theories emerge, how they are used in praxis, and how they relate to one’s subjective position in the world.

To illustrate this point, Crenshaw’s work on critical race theory and feminism and also Bruni’s statement on the status of being male are understood through narrow points of representational analysis. Utilizing an intersectional approach, one could assess intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation as metrics for understanding the social location of each perspective, which can provide useful information about power. However, assemblage can offer an opportunity for new pathways. For instance, Bruni’s perspective is journalistic in that it connects with being employed by the New York Times and is situated in mainstream—and left leaning—corporate new media. Crenshaw’s path of analysis offers a legal context of race and gender relations, and her work is situated in academic scholarship and the American legal system. This is useful and it provides insight into missing points of analysis lacking in intersectional analysis, as our legal systems, academic institutions, and media networks are intrinsically linked to systems of power, and are systems of power in themselves. Not only is assemblage an alternative approach generative of other possibilities, but it also demonstrates gaps in points of access if in praxis one is only tracing social structures through specific and systematic methodological practices.
A process-oriented approach to philosophical exploration also provides the opportunity to work across paradigms which is a key methodological consideration for my inquiry. Grosz (1993) asserts that the possibilities that are available by using a more reflexive approach allow for “bringing together diverse fragments, not only different theories, but also theories with objects and practices” (p. 174). According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016), “a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (p. 7). The ability to work across paradigms, to bring seemingly competing ideas together, is a practice that creates space for conceptualizing outside the limitations of rigid conceptual structures. Therefore, principles of multiplicities posit diversity and expansion as primary determinants of difference, rather than centralizing objectification and the subject-object distinction as the central points of analysis.

Principles of Rhizomes and Assemblages

The principles of assemblage are conceptualized in the organism-based analogy of the rhizome and the rhizome is in itself defined through these principles (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/2016). What is described as the rhizome provides a methodological schema for how the construction of assemblages is grounded in process. These principles include descriptions of: connection; heterogeneity; multiplicity; asignifying ruptures; cartography; and decalcomania (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2016). Below I will describe the significance of these principles as they apply to conceptual mapping and I will demonstrate the usage of these principles through visual representations in Chapter Four. Broadly speaking, the application of these principles are in themselves fluid, complex, and in constant states of change. They are not paradigm specific, but rather guiding features that assist people to challenge their assumptions of what constitutes a
structure and how those structures are configured both from telescopic and microscopic perspectives.

Rhizomes are not divided; each part exists in relation to one another as a heterogeneous whole. This feature of the rhizome is understood as multiplicity, challenging the primacy of the subject-object distinction. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016):

> there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or “return” in the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object. (p. 8)

This understanding of the subject-object relationship suggests an individual’s identity does not constitute objectification as a priori in any ontological sense. It challenges the premise on which the dialectical relationship is founded, and perhaps the subject-object distinction is not a rigid classification one necessarily is required to or even can confirm. Rather, one finds oneself as both subject and object simultaneously, being in a fluid state of existence in the world. This also relates to the way Freire (1970/1992) conceptualized structures that maintain dehumanization. As mentioned previously, he acknowledged that liberation requires an ontological shift for both the oppressor and the oppressed, as freedom from an object-subject informed ontological understanding (Freire, 1992). Multiplicity from this perspective is neither reductionist nor essentialist; it is premised on everything in relation, placing no particular significance to the whole or on one part of that whole over another.
Rhizomes are also heterogenetic; they are premised on de-centering qualities. As an example, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016) map out complexities of language as a rhizomatic concept:

>A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only the throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. (p. 7)

Difference in this example is heterogenic, yet not necessarily oppositional in its conceptualization. Rhizomes do not locate and describe a central feature of differentiation, but instead map how relationships connect in formations of both multiple assemblages or specific features of the assemblage structure. Rhizomes are a continuous project of reorganization, movement, connections, disconnections, emergence, ruptures, and residues (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2016). The ontological shift premised in constant change disrupts reductionist philosophical assumptions, and also decenters components of the structure itself.

The principle of de-centering offers a humanizing function that refutes the primacy of negation and de-territorializes hierarchies—not because many other philosophical perspectives are lacking utility—but because the latter prioritizes specific methods of constructing the Self. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016) argue that instead the rhizome is “the furniture we are forever rearranging” (p. 21). The methods of arrangement are dependent on many moveable and continually changing features, challenging the philosophical assumptions and limitations found in concepts such
dialectics, plurality, and intersectionality. For instance, the primacy of power relations is central
to theories previously discussed in this chapter, but how power manifests itself is diverse; it is
negotiated between various locations within the systems of regulatory power both in agreement
and resistance to the state of regulatory systems (Foucault, 1975/1995). This supports the idea
that mapping is not about specific points, but instead, an analysis of the processes that lead to
connections or disconnections.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016), de-centered connections are essential for
understanding how structures are assembled. It is the pathways rather than the points that do the
work. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016) describe this as an “abstract machine” where the
singular part is always in relation to others (p. 7); and they go on to say that “this is very
different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (p. 7). If one abandons the
idea that the goal of understanding identity is to reduce it to an essence, on a specific location,
then the conceptual work shifts towards emerging possibilities for change and can be both
diverse and ontologically affirming. This reflexive framework not only provides a point of access
for many different theoretical paradigms, but it also can be accessed by subjective experiences
and the more nuanced, diverse, and complex aspects of identity that are both multiple and fluid.

Deleuze and Guattari assert that there are no points in rhizomes, only lines (1980/2016). An
important feature of this principle is “deterritorialization” which is described by Deleuze and
Guattari as “lines of flight” (p. 9). Lines of flight or deterritorialization suggests constant
movement, which according to Grosz (1993), has the “capacity to undergo permutations and
transformations” (p. 170). The principle of deterritorialization posits that there is no absolute
centre, and no fixed status of phenomena that can be identified conceptually. Phenomena and the perceptual experience of phenomena are bound to temporal and spatial conditions constantly in a state of change. From my perspective, this requires awareness that objects of conceptual analysis are never complete or finalized; rather, objects of analysis are understood in the context of spatial and temporal particularities found in a specific set of conditions in-the-world. What deterritorialization is capable of demonstrating is moments of connection and relation, but within conditions of constant movement represented as lines of flight. However, rhizomatic lines do not merely establish new connections. Instead, the connections between rhizomes can be found to rupture, or deterritorialize, or appear inaccessible (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2016). This has important implications for my discussion of subjectivities that will be discussed in the following chapter as a view from somewhere (Haraway, 1991). A partial view from somewhere or disconnections and ruptures between them suggest that not all pathways are accessible, or perceived to be accessible. Disconnections can also be used to characterize what is inaccessible if situated in one’s specific experience and knowledge.

As described below by Deleuze and Guattari, disconnections in rhizomes are represented as asignifying ruptures. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2016) observe that “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (p. 9). Therefore, structural changes to rhizomes are accessible to both new connections and lost connections within the line of flight and are also in a constant state of change and movement. According to Deleuze and Guattari:
Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as the lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of good and bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratifly everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject—anything you like, from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions. (p. 9)

This description of ruptures raises a couple of important questions. First, are ruptures a useful way of identifying opportunities for changing social structures? Also, what directs one on new pathways and lines that emerge in rhizomes, rather than following pathways that were already given? Any concrete answer to these questions is dependent upon what one is hoping to achieve through mapping. This could include an analysis of power, agency, socialization, hegemony, performance, knowledge, perception, and social position—which are areas that I have decided to focus on in my own conceptual inquiry. Nevertheless, ruptures can demonstrate what is missing or outside of one’s reach. Unpacking these questions becomes an ontological debate about the role of agency, which is the premise of Chapter Three. From a pedagogical perspective, how theorists understand agency has a huge influence over how people are perceived as learners, especially when it comes to the autonomy to enact social change.
Grosz (1993) asserts that rhizomes are not paradigm specific, they allow for connecting macro and micro analytical practices across different formats of analysis being philosophical, sociological, or political in design. One advantage this methodology offers is the ability to look at “massified linkages” and “microlinkages”, meaning that exploration of conceptual frameworks can “bring together very diverse domains, levels, dimensions, functions, effects, aims, and objects” (Grosz, 1993, p. 174). This allows researchers using a rhizomatic method to synthesize both telescopic and microscopic perspectives. It is a method that allows subjectivities and social structures to be brought together into one object of analysis. This aligns with the idea that identity may perhaps be socially constructed, yet is also experienced as phenomenological.

The ability to encompass both macro and micro analysis within one project has important implications for pedagogical methods. It acknowledges that social conditions, are in fact, constructed; however, these social structures and how they inform knowledge are perceived and interpreted by individuals in nuanced and multiple ways from one’s specific lived situation. Each person is situated towards knowledge and experience from a specific hermeneutical position. The knowledge-experience relationship can emerge from: economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, but also, one’s level of education, the types of media one consumes, geographical location, religious affiliation, health concerns, family dynamics, trauma, or tragedy. Bringing these pieces together suggests that certain ways of understanding and experiencing the world are in reach for the individual, while other ways may be completely unacknowledged, inaccessible, or unknown. What this means for an understanding of identity, and specifically for my exploration of masculinity, is that learning comes with limitations based on what is available or at least perceived to be unavailable. Considering these factors as influential within projects of
emancipatory change, one needs to understand how people experience or perceive their own ontological position and their particular relationship to the social forces that inform one’s performance of identity.

Considering these nuances and diversity of experiential knowledge, rhizomes and assemblages can offer useful and important alternatives of understanding the relationship between masculinities, knowledge and experience. First, they can demonstrate how one learns to perform masculinity, or the process of ‘masculization’ as a process of interpreting social influences and exercising agency. Second, the principle of multiplicity suggests both non-linear and multiple pathways of socialization. Previously, I have discussed how masculinity is performed and maintained in relation to ideological structures such as capitalism, westernization and other socio-political structures. These systems are not for themselves, but rather, entangled together in broad political, social, economic, cultural, and linguistic systems. The use of assemblage also allows one to explore masculinities through these multiple and complex interactions with intersecting social systems, institutions, and social norms.

Movement is also a significant factor in masculinities. One is not masculine in the same way in all situations and circumstances, nor does the experience of masculinity remain consistent over time. On the contrary, expressions of masculinity can range from complacent, to toxic, to emancipatory, which may be dependent on sites of deterritorialization and lines of flight. Through an examination masculine subjectivities, one can assess what is missing from being able to reach towards emancipatory change, or find self-actualization within a social justice discourse. Ruptures can also tell us why men might retreat to violence, misogyny, or sexist practices as
barriers to developing a humanized approach to understanding masculinities. From a pedagogical perspective, understanding masculinities will likely be restricted if one limits the concepts and social symbols of masculinities to oppositional practices without offering ontologically-affirming alternatives. Furthermore, advocates for change must acknowledge the precarity of diversity and continue being critical of stereotypes that perpetuate the assumption of homogeneous collective identities. Masculinities should be understood in a way that is cognizant of the nuances of self-experience, yet that is in relation to social influences that inform performances of masculinity and toxic acts of misogyny. Taking an integrated approach, the next chapter will provide a discussion of situating the subject in the social world. I will review the conflicts that are often found in discussions between what is phenomenological and what is socially constructed, the tension between the primacy of language and the ability to act on free will.

**Assemblages in the Classroom**

Assemblage theory reminds educators about the complexity and fluidity of learning spaces and I would like to close this chapter by discussing why assemblage theory matters. Specifically, I am reflecting on how the epistemology of gender identity relates to my experiences as a facilitator of boys groups encouraging healthy expressions of masculinity. This reflection on epistemic experience is informed by principles of rhizome theory including connections, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and asignifying ruptures as these principles apply to social justice education aimed at men and boys (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/2016).

My professional role as a sexual health educator extends beyond a discussion of safer sex practices and relationship skills and includes navigating what is often a divisive and oppositional
environment of political and experiential differences. Acknowledging the importance of political discourse suggests that influences such as the media and information one consumes contributes to one’s knowledge and worldviews concerning their own gender identity and the gender identities of others. Therefore, one makes choices about their understanding identities based on their interpretation of the information they are exposed to and how this impacts their own life.

There is no shortage in diversity of opinions when discussing the topic of masculine identities. When running educational groups for boys, it is not uncommon to have participants resist engagement with the topic of gender-based violence including defensive statements related how males are broadly represented in media surrounding feminist perspectives and movements like #metoo. At the same time, other students report excitement regarding discussions on non-violent and healthy expressions of masculinity. This heterogeneity within learning spaces not only suggests educators are working with diverse people, but also working with diverse epistemic realities in a shared space of knowledge, experience, and learning.

In some of my workshops gender inequality is understood by participants as being a ‘women’s issue’ and feminism is often characterized by participants as ‘anti-male’. I have been asked on many occasions why we are learning about concepts that characterize men in such a negative fashion. When these issues are discussed it is not uncommon to hear comments related to shame and confusion about one’s personal role in the context of patriarchy. In these instances, there is a disconnect between structural issues and personal experiences reported by some learners. There is often resistance to connect the political to the personal. Boys often become frustrated and it is not uncommon to hear participants become defensive of their male peers when discussing media
coverage of sexual misconduct. These reflections demonstrate the existence of ruptures,
connections, heterogeneity, and multiplicities common in educational social justice spaces,
specifically the need to connect the political to the personal as an invitation to become allies
rather than a discourse that leads to disengagement.

Other students who experience marginalization in their own lives have reported feeling like their
experience is minimized because their male privilege is prioritized over other harmful instances
of oppression such as homophobia or racism, which through the use of assemblage theory does
not need to be characterized using reductionist or essentialist measures of identity politics. Space
needs to be made for nuance and complexity of gender by balance ambiguity with critical
thinking. Assemblage theory allows for this ambiguity and a fluid understanding of social
systems. Of course, it is vitally important that people are educated explicitly on social inequality,
yet at the same time educators need to understand more about the goals of these discussions and
the conditions by which people are willing and interested in entering discussions of social
justice. This is especially true when introducing complex theories that are difficult for youth to
understand. This suggests that educators need to invest in teaching methods that are accessible
for individuals that are engaging with these concepts for the first time by understanding that
issues like ignorance and defensiveness are likely the point of departure for many participants in
these types of discussions.

When people feel confused, misrepresented, or defensive they are more likely to turn their backs
towards opportunities to engage with social justice worldviews and perspectives for
understanding social issues. There is no shortage of groups such as MRA’s or online involuntary
celibate groups that promote hate, intolerance, and violence that encourage men to turn away from social justice. This is a growing problem in our society and is precisely why meaningful connection is important to encourage investment social justice practices. Males in positions of privilege need to understand that their role in social change matters.

My goal in this thesis is to determine how educators can develop useful strategies to make social justice a more inclusive and meaningful space for men and boys from positions of privilege by helping them to recognize their role in social change. From my perspective, it is important that the youth that I work with are able to situate learning through personal experience as a way of making social justice matter. I encourage those who I work with to reflect critically on where they get their information about the world and how factors like race and class inform certain worldviews. This mode of facilitating education creates opportunities to recognize that there is no singular objective perspective, but instead healthy communities are created through connecting multiplicities and addressing instances where disconnections occur through practices of reflexivity and empathy. It is essential that educators treat all learners as complex human beings by not reducing human experience to performances that are oppositional or defined exclusively by the politics of gender identity.
Chapter 3: Performative Ambiguity and Expressions of Precarity

Mapping intersectional masculinities informed through culture, sexual orientation, and other social signifiers is foundational to the discursive practices of current identity politics. Often one’s critical analysis of identity is measured by examining the relationships between representational social identities and power. Heterogeneity reveals itself when people are asked to make personal qualifications for identity signifiers in the context of social groups and how personal narratives are positioned within the social context. Regardless of the value of personal narratives in themselves, what is understood socially is partially defined through a subjective lens of personal histories, experiences, and knowledge. Synthesizing socialization and subjective understanding suggests an interdependency that requires not only a system of communication about the world, but also a subject or actor to interpret and perform these systems of communication and language. Synthesis of both individual and social understandings of identity acknowledges that human identities are not exclusively replications of social symbols, nor are human beings capable of unimpeded free will.

The philosophical debate over the primacy of the socially constructed and free will raises the question: do subjects create masculinities, or is the social representations of masculinities creating subjects? I suggest that we do not need to assert either of these positions in an absolutist manner and can abstain from theorizing about an explicit a priori status of masculinities from either perspective. Instead, conditions of agency and discourse—in synthesis—reveal both points of conflict and points of convergence for the limitations and opportunities for philosophical positioning of Otherness. The illustrate this point, the position of Otherness depends on the subject position and from the masculine perspective is traditionally feminine, yet from the
position of femininity, masculinity becomes the Other as an object of feminist analysis. Although my conceptualization of Otherness may stray from the traditional philosophical meaning, what is not identified as the subject is always in the status of Other regardless of one’s social position within the social relations of power.

A synthesis of the social and the personal establishes philosophical boundaries of how masculinity and other forms of identity can be conceptualized and understood. Identifying the limitations in the epistemology of masculinities directs philosophical discourse towards the idea of situatedness as one’s particular situation, where the concept of the individual and the social synthesize as an assemblage of experience-in-the-world. As described in detail in chapter two, my practice of conceptual mapping will be utilized extensively throughout this philosophical exploration to demonstrate the relationship between the perceptual experience of maleness and masculinity as socially established in patriarchal intersubjective conditions.

**Doing Gender**

The performance of gender observes that gender goes beyond something that one is; rather, it is also something that one does. For Butler, one’s gender identity is constituted when signified in discourse and language through mechanisms of performativity. As a concept, performativity includes a framework of what bodies do as understood in: psychoanalytic, postmodern, feminist and semiotic theoretical frameworks. Butler famously said that “various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all” (1988, p. 522). Therefore, gender is produced by the forces such as discourse, power, repetition, and regulation. Indeed, Butler’s understanding of bodies is more about the governance over what a body can do, rather than an account of the corporeal body in-itself. From Butler’s perspective—and of
particular importance—is the observation that what bodies do is constructed through social and discursive activities that cannot exist outside the structures of language. Beyond the materiality of the body, bodies perform social and cultural functions; therefore, human bodies both do gender and are gendered. Performativity is situated in practice and regulation of bodies, a situation that allows for “forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes” (Butler, 1993, p. 15).

Performativity is “not a prescriptive task” and in this way is similar to Foucault’s (1976/1988) observation of bio-power suggesting that both subversive and normalized practices of identity are appropriated through bodies and the conventional linguistic understanding of what bodies can and should accomplish (Butler, 2010, p. 26). Performativity is then constructed through social performances both practiced and learned. One’s gender performance is not mere an exercise of autonomous free will. The “regimes of discourse/power” are not explicitly voluntary or individualistic, rather bodies are objects in-the-world prior to language and knowledge, but in a more arbitrary and ambiguous form without connection to the semiotic characterization which represents the status of the bodies (Butler, 1993, p. 15). Specifically, there is an intrinsic relationship between the culture of power and the epistemology of the body.

Butler’s philosophical assessment of the performative body is appropriately entitled: *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993). She suggests that gender performativity is a regulatory practice that “produces the bodies it governs… whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce-demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls” (p. 1). These regulatory practices or norms produce the relationship between
power and performance within the construct of normalized social attitudes, behaviours, and hierarchical social conditions. This manifests as a collective effort as “performativity is not a single act” (Butler, 2010, p. 94) but a cultural assemblage that is continually being negotiated and constructed by all performers of gender. Therefore, systems of performativity must not only be constructed, but they must also be maintained, reinforced, and legitimized.

Butler considers repetition as the practice through which normative performances are maintained by way of the reinforcing of rewards and punishments “both obvious and indirect” (1988, p. 528). Direct and obvious punishment are both overtly and covertly positioned in social norms; as collective communities we maintain these norms—and the associated punishments—through performances reinforced by repetition. For instance, a study on male preschool teachers entitled “Male Preschool Teacher Students Negotiating Masculinities” found that not only was this a field where male participation was underrepresented, but also there was stigma expressed by both parents and other staff related to men working with young children. Heikkilä and Hellman (2017) observed that, “male sexuality can be seen as a major part of masculinity in preschools from the point of view of parents… addressing [men] with suspicion” (p. 1217). In Heikkilä and Hellman’s study, the suspicious attitudes of parents and other staff as reported by these male preschool teachers are identified in relation to connections between men who work with young children and pedophilia (2017). Male pre-school teachers included in this study also expressed receiving negative feedback about their profession of choice from male friends and family members (Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017). Here, the punishments are overtly reinforced through emasculating those who move away from masculine stereotypes in their decisions regarding employment. These instances of performativity expressed through various gender identities
observe that maintaining patriarchal norms is performed, in part, by all genders, and not explicitly men by way of regulatory practices and performative reinforcement that stigmatizes men who work with young children as pedophiles. In fact, the maintenance of patriarchal norms is upheld by most people regardless of their gender identity, which is a case for how males are also the objects of patriarchy through the lens of the Other.

Use of the term performativity, rather than performance, presents itself as a collective social activity. An individual performs gender for themselves, for and towards the Other, and the Other performs gender as an object for the Self. What I suggest results from these complex webs of gender socialization is not an explicitly linear or hierarchical relationship, but instead an assemblage of entanglements and multiplicities that inform our systems of gender regulation. This realization directs me to ask exactly how agency should be included in this analysis. How much autonomy does one have over the formation of their own gender identity and the associated attitudes and behaviours that regulate gender? Considering that gender construction is a shared social project, masculinity can be signified as the experience of men—from the perspective of the male subject, but also must consider that masculinity is an object of gender perspective of the Other. I recognize this distinction as one between maleness—the corporeal experience of being male—and masculinities—the social representation of what qualifies as distinctly male.

The Othering of the male position can be understood through Butler’s use of Althusser’s concept of interpellation where the formation of one’s selfness not merely an internal process, but instead, is constituted by way of objectification, which is iterated by the Other through the
signification of the masculine as having object status (1993). Therefore, one potential characterization of a subject arrives at the time they are identified and defined by the Other and the discourse through which they speak to or at that subject through acts of objectification. According to Butler (2010), one’s sense of gender is “always constantly constituted by others” (p. 35). In both normative and resistance-based discourses, masculinities are often an object of critical feminist analysis and agency is restricted not only on the conditions of discursive practices, but also on the ideological positioning through which one’s discursive practices perceive masculine subjects. In both cases, masculinities are the centralized object of analysis.

Even in acts of resistance, naming power is paradoxically a reinforcement of norms as well as intended to resist normative signifiers of gender identity (Butler, 1993). From this perspective, social justice activities meant to enact social change include contradictions in relation to the relationship between agency and resistance-based performances, insofar as “citing of the dominant norms does not, in this instance, displace the norm; rather it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects” (Butler, 1993, p. 133). It is worth critically reflecting on what should be constituted as resistance and how agency is situated when the interpellation of one’s identity is formed outside themselves.

To demonstrate the difficulty of how resistance materializes in the context of collective gender signification, self-identified transgender-men who actively express resistance to patriarchal norms remain as regulatory objects of normalization. Not all presentations of masculinities are defined explicitly through biological sex characteristics; additionally, biological characteristics
are not always known nor are required to be known in acts of interpellation. Nevertheless, the assumed embodiment of masculinities as perceived by the Other impacts both resistance and regulatory based activities. In fact, not all embodiments of maleness are intended to reinforce stereotypical masculinity in their signification (Gottzén & Straube, 2016). Men who may or may not intend to conform to masculine norms find themselves in situations of being an object of normalization.

Personal narratives provided by participants in Aboim’s study on transgender experiences of masculinity (2016) suggests that masculinities can be materialized outside of one’s agency and control. Aboim’s research accounts for the experiences of trans-men who transition from identifying as female to male, and how their perceived sense of selfhood is distinctly in opposition to how others interpret their identity in relation to gender norms. One participant reflects of their online employment profile observing that “the only thing I did was to change my name, my gender…I didn’t even change my picture, it’s very androgynous” (Aboim, 2016, p. 231). They go on to acknowledge that “I’m the same person with the same qualifications. But now that I’ve changed my gender and name, employers come looking for me” (Aboim, 2016, p. 231). In this example, gender as represented in an online professional employment profile, is both objectified and interpellated through the perspective of potential employers. What is significant about this sort of experience is that the written word, or check mark in a box to indicate one’s gender, is understood by potential employers through the usage of dominant discourse associated with masculine norms. The representation of maleness as masculinity is strictly signified by its linguistic character offered in the online profile and how others interpret what that profile represents. Through acts of interpellation, even one’s gender embodiment as
dissent from norms can result in unintended consequences such as being a recipient of the
patriarchy dividend, or the benefits of being identified as a male member of society (Connell,
2005). Indeed, these consequences exist even if the assertion of masculinity by the Other
contradicts one’s lived experience of maleness.

Returning to the point of resistance and perceived normative embodiment, there is a
contradictory signification between the body as an object and the body as a means of expressing
subjectivity. How someone perceives their own identity may not be signified or iterated in
alignment with the subject’s intentionality. Depending on what information is available to others,
male bodies—both trans-male and cis-male—may not align with one’s internal sense of their
gender identity. Specifically, in the case of trans-men, transitions in gender identity are perhaps
intended to resist essentialist or reductionist worldviews on gender expression. At the same time,
one’s transition to a masculine-identified identity is in some ways simultaneously a signifier of
masculinity as it is known in public discourse. Here, the embodiment of male privilege is not
necessarily informed by the performativity of the trans-male subject. Instead, the privileges of
masculinity are signified through the performative assertions of others. This demonstrates that
what constitutes the conditions of one’s gender identity is not a completely autonomous activity
and the conditions that perpetuate gender inequality are well beyond the scope of one’s personal
account of their own gender. Again, Aboim’s work (2016) presents an example of the
embodiment of masculinity from the position of trans-maleness and the corporeal contradictions
that arise in the relationship between embodiment and what bodies do:
I think my transition has improved my life, but I think a lot of that is down to my confidence growing and being able to feel more myself, rather than a stranger to my own body. But also, I think it might be to do with how I am perceived as male. I think that is a big one as well, because I think definitely since transitioning that now that people view me more as male, there is definitely male privilege, which does make me feel uncomfortable. (p. 231)

In these examples cited in Aboim’s work, masculinities are a point of conflict where the internal sense of masculinity is self-fulfilling, yet at the same time interpellation results in discomfort with the privilege that comes along with male embodiment. As expressed in Aboim’s work, being a recipient of the patriarchal dividend can be both rewarding, yet also disorienting. Aboim (2016) asserts that "[e]pistemologically, the who can be heuristically replaced by the how, with an emphasis on the processes and effects of becoming or transitioning. Rather than asking who does masculinity, the trigger question should be about how it is done” (2016, p. 230).

Gender-affirming transitions, in the case of Aboim’s work, result in a synthesis of agency and discursive norms—including the benefits and punishments that accompany these norms. What is reassuring from the voices of Aboim’s participants is that the ability to embody an affirming and fulfilling gender identity can be achieved through an open and inviting climate of gender inclusion that celebrates diversity. On the other hand, both these participants—in their experiences of gender transition—demonstrate the limitations of agency through acts of objectification and through the perspective of the Other.
From the post-structuralist perspective, human agency is understood as socially constructed or at least is understood as being rather limited (Butler, 1988, 1993, 2010; Foucault, 1975/1995, 1976/1988; Lacan, 1985). The constructs of language permit access to certain epistemological perspectives, which are only understood and communicable through the constructs of language (Foucault, 1976/1988). Therefore, one is restricted to communication within the structures of language making space for specific sets of communicative possibilities. Agency from the post-modern position is limited to the structures and conditions of language. Butler (2010) states that the “iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility” (p. 101). From the perspectives of both Butler (1988, 1993, 2010) and Foucault (1975/1995, 1976/1988), agency is positioned within the relationship between language and multiple systems of power, especially in terms of linguistic signifiers of social identity and hierarchies of power based on how social locations are symbolically represented. Butler also argues that (1993):

if there is agency, it is to be found, paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by the constrained appropriation of the regulatory law, by the materialization of that law, the compulsory appropriation and identification with those normative demands. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

What is perceived as agency is limited to the scope of what is permitted and negotiated as ‘acceptable’ within the normative discourse as negotiated through relations of power. The acceptable is extensively codified in symbols such as: institutional policy, popular culture, internet memes, and washroom signage. These examples establish both boundaries and
guidelines that qualify the limits of social acceptability through the use of language—both spoken and symbolic—and how language is understood and intersubjectively regulated in relation to knowledge (Foucault, 1976/1988).

From my perspective, understanding masculinities also requires an analysis of how language is understood by diverse groups of people and individuals, and not only through the lens of those who are the perceived benefactors of andro-hetero-centric cultural norms. This consideration is essential because intentional acts of resistance are not necessarily reiterated as such in social relationships. Furthermore, one does not necessarily need to inhabit corporeal maleness or perform masculinities in order to be an agent of perpetuating and maintaining patriarchal norms. Instead, the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinities is maintained by all people positioned throughout diverse genders, sexual orientations, and cultures.

How masculinities are learned and understood is also a culturally diverse phenomenon. A compilation of essays in Anderson and Innes’s 2015 anthology *Indigenous Men and Masculinities* bring into view not only diverse perspectives on what masculinity is, but also how the intersections of sexism and colonization formulate a particular experience of masculinity. In Anderson and Innes’s anthology an essay entitled “To Arrive Speaking: Voices from the Bidwewidam Indigenous Masculinities Project”, includes a transcript of a talking circle discussion that observes the covert nature and scope of masculine performativity within groups of Indigenous males. One talking circle participant states that “when you talk about masculinity—I don’t think we had it—it’s a white problem” (Anderson, Swift, & Innes, 2015, p. 287). Therefore, what is signified as ‘the masculinity problem’ in a discourse of decolonization
can also be distant from one’s embodiment of maleness in relation to the hegemonic attributes of masculinity. In this case, masculinity in the hegemonic form intersects with colonization, which seemingly makes masculinity appear out of reach. However, in the same essay “To Arrive Speaking”, Anderson, Swift, and Innes, (2015) observe that hegemonic masculinity is entangled in colonizing practices that are directly related to the trauma experienced by Indigenous communities. Perceived distance from hegemonic masculinity suggests that through other intersections the masculine object may seem distant from the male subject and their perception of maleness. Therefore, Indigenous men may not actually consider themselves as active in patriarchal performances, but instead, may be more likely to align with what it means to be Indigenous. However, here, hegemonic aspects of masculinity could be performed covertly and possibly without a critical awareness of its impact on these individuals, their families, and their communities. Perhaps, one should consider that this is not an act of agency or intentional ignorance, but instead a consequence of the trauma and loss of identity experienced through acts of colonization. A critical understanding of masculinity in this context is an effort to heal from both the toxic effects of patriarchy and colonization through revitalization of Indigenous ways of doing and knowing. (Anderson & Innes, 2015). In the context of Indigenous healing, masculinity not only shifts away from Western male socialization, but also towards a different way of being male that is found in traditional Indigenous cultures. Similarly, white and privileged men are faced with a different dilemma insofar as traditional white masculinity is patriarchal and there is no healthy and inclusive model for change that intersects with whiteness and masculinities.

Significantly, what is made available through an Indigenous pedagogy and cultural ways of knowing is useful for the broader discourse of masculinities. Of course, pedagogical engagement
through an Indigenous lens should be wary of appropriation and avoid perpetuating colonial practices. Nevertheless, there is educational value when utilizing a critical framework that disrupts Western and normative ways of understanding masculinities. Specifically, Indigenous social conditions challenge the assumption of dialectical logic. In “Taxonomies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Heterosexual Patriarchal Masculinity” Indigenous scholar Brendan Hokowhitu (2015) states that “the dialectics between heteropatriarchal masculinity and feminism, and colonized/colonizer become complicated, as Indigenous masculinities are both imbibed with privilege and denied; both performing colonial heteropatriarchy and resisting it” (p. 83).

Therefore, the dialectical assumption of the Self and the Other becomes complicated in one’s navigation of multiple embodiments of identity in intersectional systems of oppression. In this context, Indigenous men simultaneously perform masculine domination within their communities, yet are marginalized within the larger society because of their colonized status as Indigenous and as subordinate in the the framework of hegemonic masculinity. The Indigenous experience of masculinity is not merely dialectical, but rather an assemblage of multiple identities simultaneously navigating diverse yet situated social conditions.

Movement away from a dialectic understanding and towards a humanistic and situated approach can also borrow from Indigenous principles through a lens of healing and resistance to hierarchical systems of gender-based knowledge. In an Indigenous context, this is taken up as “nation building” and as taking an approach to understanding differences in the context of being “complementary”, “reciprocal”, “interdependent”, and “inclusive” (Sneider, 2015, pp. 64-65). This way of knowing seemingly does the work of differentiation that is not determined as such through practices of opposition. Instead, this type of framework offers an alternative way of
acknowledging difference through reciprocity and community, suggesting that differences that come along with identity and diversity are the attributes that create healthy and strong communities. It is not so much that gender is reducible to roles but instead, the way roles and differences are identified in relation to productivity or value needs to become diversified given that the experience of embodying masculinities is practiced in diverse ways (see p.19 on sex role theory). This is also useful as a measure to address the problem of opposition in this broader discussion of identity. If one re-conceptualizes what it means to be distinct or different within a community as a contribution rather than a deficit, space is created for an alternative ontological understanding of the Other and how the relationship between Self and Other is relationally performed. However, transformative relationships require more than an alternative signification of the Other; what is also necessary is critical reflection on knowledge about the Self.

In the assemblage section of the previous chapter, I turned towards Deleuzian analysis as a decentering strategy to assess broad social markers of identity by allowing space for in-group diversity. The concept of decentering is also applicable to the concept of one’s self. I suggest that selfhood is both one’s perceptual account of the world, but also how the world informs one’s perceptual account. Ontologically, and within the debate between the primacy of individual will versus the primacy of social construction, these two perspectives become entangled as a sense of shared social conditions that inform both cultural norms and deviation from these norms. Through a post-modernist lens, the method of exploring identity is grounded in discourse, language, and power, where the internal and centralized understanding of the body is not only externalized, but also politicized. From this perspective, masculinities are performed simultaneously as embodiments of subjects—being the lived and expressed ontological position
of a Self—and also as objects—or the Other as an ontological relationship that objectifies an individual to serve the self-consciousness from the position of the subject. The idea that all people are simultaneously subjects and objects blurs the binary distinction between the two philosophical positions. By extension, the philosophical debate of what constitutes “the real” (Lacan, 1985) is also implicated in this discussion of subjects and objects insofar as accounting for how materiality and experience inform discursive mythologies of truth.

The ongoing philosophical debate concerning identity is premised on the primacy of materiality versus experience. Judith Butler asks the question “[c]an language simply refer to materiality, or is language also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?” (1993, p. 31). Butler (1993) argues that there is no pure formation of autonomous selfhood outside of the boundaries of what is socially constructed, suggesting that:

There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitutes the we cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds- and fails to proceed. (p. 124, emphasis in original)

Due to the limitations of knowledge that frame this philosophical debate, an adequate argument can be made from either the materialist or post-modernist perspective. On the one hand, stripping masculinities and maleness from semiotic descriptors and signifiers could result in an inability to
communicate what the masculine signifies, and so it is worth considering if masculinities do exist outside of the structures of language. Lacan (1985) observes “that it is not only man [sic] who speaks, but in man and through man that it speaks, that his nature is woven by effects in which we can find the structure of language, whose material he becomes” (p. 78). On the other hand, what would language be aiming to signify if there was no pre-linguistic object that could be identified as separate from one’s self? Destabilizing the absolutist position of either of these perspectives starts with asking if it is necessary to reduce one philosophical perspective to the logic of the opposite perspective, or whether both these perspectives can be utilized in synthesis as a collaborative pedagogical framework for emancipatory social change?

Following both Lacan and Butler’s arguments for the primacy of language in the materialization of gender, defining individuals is a semiotic matter before arriving as material form. From this perspective, all individuals are implemented as both subjects and objects simultaneously when constructing gender identities: for ourselves; for others; and as contributing authors to the regulatory practice of gender identity. Foucault (1976/1988); Lacan (1985); and Butler (1988, 1993, 2010); collectively observe that it is what bodies do rather than what bodies are that is the fruitful object of analysis for examining the epistemology of gender. Perhaps, this is why genealogy is the method of choice for these gender identity theorists rather than etymology. The signifier masculine in-itself is arbitrary; that is, it does no work for itself, and has no significance without relation to its semiotic character and the social relationships that manifest through a socially understood linguistic character of masculinities. It is how one does masculinity that leads to problematic gender relationships; specifically, how it is performed and how it is discursively understood in relation to formulations of social power.
Being Gender

Turning towards the experience of being a gender, phenomenological analysis provides an assessment of how individuals perceive the world. My methodological review of phenomenology borrows from both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sara Ahmed’s works on the positionality of the subject. When combined, their work exemplifies the significance of perceptual realities in relation to discourse, performance, and social structures discussed in the preceding sections and chapters. Merleau-Ponty brings a historical perspective on phenomenology drawing on the work of Husserl and Heidegger, but is particularly focused on the idea of perception and positional corporeality as qualifiers for the phenomenological status. Ahmed’s work is a more contemporary approach that brings together the concepts of phenomenology with intersectionality, gender identity, and queerness. In Chapter Four, Ahmed’s approach will be used to design a map of masculine hermeneutics utilizing a synthesis of proximity borrowing from both Deleuze and Guattari’s work on assemblage and Ahmed’s work on orientation.

Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as “a philosophy that places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is from their facticity” (1945/2012, p. xx). This posits the importance of not only the relationship between the world and the Self, but also how epistemology is determined in relation to these two conditions of arriving at ‘knowing’. In practice, the phenomenological method aims to provide a description of the world as it is given to the existing subject, or an account of how the world is experienced as “lived space, lived time, and a lived world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. xx). The significance of phenomenology is the spatial and temporal considerations that constitute a perceived reality,
identity, or experience, and the limitations that determine knowledge from a certain place, a specific time, and the particular experiences that inform one’s understanding of the world.

Access to a knowledge of the world is mediated through one’s own body, bringing together experiences, interactions, cognition, and histories. Merleau-Ponty states that “I have no other means of knowing the human body than by living in it, that is, by taking up for myself the drama that moves through it and by merging with it” (1945/2012, p. 205). As discussed in Butler’s reflection on interpellation, one’s identity is also object for others, and one’s status of being-in-the-world suggests one’s identity exists as both a subject and object simultaneously (Butler, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Being-in-the-world observes that humans are not distant objective observers, but rather, our interpretations are situated in our particular embodied position or perceptual location, which is informed through social and linguistic symbols, discourses, and other signifiers of gender as an object for others (Heidegger, 1988/1999).

Using Merleau-Ponty’s own example of observing a house, one can understand how one’s access to the world is through a limited view (1945/2012). His method observes an object-horizon structure, where we perceive a singular or even partial object by concealing others (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). The result of this perspective is a partial account of the world rather than an absolute, complete, or total representation. One’s own knowledge and experience fill in the perceptual gaps and speculate on the unknown based on what is understood as subjectively historical or experienced. If you are standing in a room, you can observe specific aspects of the house. Standing on the sidewalk, you get a view of the outside of the house. If you turn this way or that way, your perceptual account may shift. What is not directly observed is filled in
cognitively through socialized knowledge, previous experience, regulatory practices, and the limitations of situated corporeality. Perhaps, one has memories of being inside a particular house, or certain knowledge about construction or architecture. Another individual might experience these phenomena differently through their own assemblages of experience and knowledge. Perhaps, this second individual has no knowledge of construction or architecture. Furthermore, one does not only internalize how they perceive the world; rather, their expressions are active in the construction of the shared world and, individuals both contribute to and interpret what is considered shared social conditions. One also expresses themselves in-the-world both as subject and object. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of *expression* observes that what one expresses in and towards the world is also a contributing factor to creating the world. Adams (2008) reflects on the use of the term *expression* in Merleau-Ponty’s work by stating:

> expression must lie between the reproduction of the already expressed and the creation of a new meaning. Somehow, that is, expression must occur in the transition between the old and the new, between the text and the interpreter, between the past and the present, between the already spoken and the speaking of the yet to be expressed. (p. 156)

Expressions in time and space are important features of understanding knowledge because they are both specific and situated. Speech needs to be acquired; we are not born with a knowledge of language, but instead, acquire language through our experiences and development conditioned in particular spaces, times, and in the context of intersubjective signification (Gallagher 1992). This perspective challenges the classic philosophical position on the status of epistemology. As Socrates was known to suggest that all knowledge is already in the world, Merleau-Ponty would
likely respond by saying knowledge needs to be expressed in order to exist at all. From the perspective of Socrates, knowledge is something material and objective that can be accessed. In this case, one may not have specific aspects of knowledge available to them, but this knowledge already exists a priori in the world. Knowledge conceptualized this way is in itself and material in its character. From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty, knowledge is embodied through the perceptual character and location of an individual and so is intertwined with the particularities of one’s experience. This observation suggests that there is a synthesis of knowledge, experience, and perception. From my perspective, Merleau-Ponty’s account of knowledge is constructed through experience. I suggest that the acquisition of language is negotiated between the phenomenological and the social, perhaps not as practiced by free agents, yet not necessarily in an objective and universal field of knowledge.

The place from where one perceives the world is in reference to the body, and bodies are situated in a particular set of perceptual conditions. According to Stoller (2010), individuals “ex-press existence” through the body as a way of interpreting and connecting to the world (p. 106, emphasis in original). Given the connection between the body and experience, the body is what permits knowledge to materialize from one’s perceptual position in the world, even if there was a universal form of knowledge, how it is interpreted is likely to vary from individual to individual in relation to their lived experiences. How the body is positioned in the world is related to the types of knowledge and experiences that are available, and what defines one’s knowledge of the Self and the Other. Bodies “actively evoke, interpret, and transform meaning” (Adams, 2008, p. 153). This leads to the discrepancies in the facticity of a shared understanding of certain types of identities. Embodiment of a self and the objectification of others are both important for
intersubjective communication and the ontological and epistemological results of communicating.

There is an antagonistic relationship across philosophical perspectives on the roles of bodies and language. Butler challenges the primacy of material bodies without considering the requirement of linguistic and discursive mechanisms for determining what bodies are and what bodies do as an ontological activity or assessment of the experience of self-consciousness (1993). Butler’s critique of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (1988) observes that identity is “an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities” insofar as through culture the body is a “set of possibilities to be continually realized” (p. 521) in the context of social symbols and representations of the material world. Both theories of performance and expression may be neither mutually exclusive nor philosophically opposed to one another. According to Stoller (2010), “Butler and Merleau-Ponty agree with the idea that meaning comes into existence at the same time it is produced” (p. 109). Therefore, both the hermeneutical account of the subject and the influence of social signifiers co-author one’s productive understanding of identities in synthesis. Even Butler (1988) acknowledges the role of individuals in stating that, “subjective experience is not only structured by existing political arrangements, but effects and structures those arrangements in turn” (p.522). This relates to my discussion of assemblage that highlights how structures are constructed by multiple, diverse, and fluid epistemological structures, which are constructed in a synthesis of language and language users. Although the embodiment of maleness is influenced by patriarchal ideology, male subjects are not merely empty vessels of patriarchal hegemony. Instead, men simultaneously construct and interpret these social assemblages through various parts of their own subjectivities, including how they interpret social
symbols and norms. Perhaps, there is some sort of objective material truth or reality that is shared by human beings, which remains unknown beyond the structures of language. Nevertheless, it is disputed whether humans can have a comprehensively shared and objective knowledge of that reality outside the conditions of language and other forms of social construction (Butler, 1993). This is not to say that there is no reality or that human existence is a solipsistic situation of being, but the limitations of language are intrinsic to how we can provide a discourse of a concrete or universally shared framework of knowledge.

Through integrating both Merleau-Ponty and Butler’s perspectives, identity becomes a relational construct on the basis of individual understandings and the social symbols that signify the ontological status of the world. From this perspective, there is no explicitly objective position of knowledge that is available for assessing the legitimacy of socially determined truths versus personal truths. Instead, truth is perhaps somewhere in-between free will and social determinism. According to Stoller (2010), “gender is something in-between voluntarism and determinism. It is not voluntary because it depends on cultural norms, and it is not determined because it requires performative acts” (p. 102). Stoller’s position is extremely helpful for understanding the relationship between individuals and social conditions for mapping one’s capacity for knowledge and learning. It is in fact invaluable to locate power as it relates to the conditions of oppression in order to understand how inequality operates and is produced. However, emancipatory learning in some form requires recognizing the relationship between the social and phenomenological interpretations of the world as hermeneutical analyses. By placing these two seemingly competing ideas together, one is directed towards the space between point A and point B: the space where the embodiment of social signifiers becomes both situated and intersectional.
The synthesis of the post-structural and the phenomenological lenses of masculinities broadens what a critical education on the topic of masculinities may look like as praxis. The relationship between educators and learners suggests the importance of communication in intersubjective educational environments. Through this synthesis, the perspectives of both learners and educators move away from what masculinities do in the broader sense and towards what individuals think masculinities do as understood through their own experience and iterations. An attention to the individual in social justice addresses my curiosity regarding why gender subordination and marginalization persists despite the prevalence of feminist political discourse in contemporary Western society and in mainstream media. Perhaps, the social order of patriarchy persists because dominant males who benefit from the patriarchal dividend not only perceive their own experiences as distant from feminist discourse, but are also fearful of the consequences of speaking out against the normalization of gender-based violence which could include peer shaming and stigmatizing towards men who speak out about these social issues.

Reflecting on investment strategies might be a helpful method of demonstrating why feminist discourse fails to engage so many men in emancipatory efforts towards better relationships across gender. Reflecting on this issue Connell (2005, p.221) asks the question “how can a politics whose main theme is anger towards men serve to mobilize men broadly?” This is perhaps one of the cardinal questions I encounter in my professional work engaging in educational conversations meant to challenge toxic or hegemonic masculinity. I would argue against Connell’s notion that anger towards men is the primary message or intention central to feminist thinking. However, I see value in the analysis of how men and boys engage in a topic where there are both considered to be the source of the problem and the object of analysis.
Reflecting on Connell’s question regarding mobilizing men, I want to acknowledge that an investment in learning and knowledge acquisition perhaps requires a personal utility beyond understanding how power structures are assembled and maintained. To enact change, one needs to be attuned to change through bringing together the political and personal. The synthesis of the personal and the political is imperative for social change, as social change happens at a micro-level through the performances and contributions of individuals, but also in relation to social regulation (hooks, 2005). Therefore, one should recognize the phenomenological processes which facilitate the relationships between these social assemblages and the subject’s own ontological understanding of their identity.

Much of my professional work invites male identified youth to discuss feminist ideas and critically engage with the issue of sexual violence in our communities. The expressed sentiment from many participants is frustration regarding their perceived role as the Other in these discussions, as patriarchy tends to orient youth towards a position of normalcy. This is what seems most familiar to many participants and what likely informs their perceived ontological realities. That is, in discussions framed in a feminist perspective, men may become the object of power analysis, which is disorienting and distant. On the one hand, some of these young men and boys may be looking for an alternative to traditional forms of masculinity, which is a presentation of masculinity that is rarely celebrated, or even talked about. On the other hand, a lot of the youth I facilitate workshops with report frustration that comes from both the perceived reality that feminism suggests that all men are bad, as well as a feeling of being unwelcome or ‘villainized’ when participating in activities that are aimed at addressing gender-based violence. This is both a misunderstanding of what feminism in the broader sense is meant to achieve, and
also a failure of the ability to situate one’s own ‘being-ness’ in this type of conversation. Perhaps many youth with whom I work find themselves in this space of both objectification and disorientation. When challenging the normalization of toxic masculine behaviour, many youth report an inability to find space as an ally where they have a voice regarding their own situation of being-in-the-world.

I am not suggesting that patriarchal worldviews should not be disrupted. According to local scholar of Indigenous Studies Tanaka (2016), some of our best learning takes place in spaces of discomfort. The relationship between discomfort and learning is widely cited throughout philosophical literature including the works of Plato (Diller, 1998). Indeed, the relationship between learning and discomfort is well accounted for as the anxiety that is present in the departure from what one ‘knows’ (Nietzsche (1873/1976). In these moments of discomfort how should men and boys position themselves towards knowledge? From my perspective, and when in these spaces of discomfort, privileged males should position themselves as listeners. Boler (1999) illustrates this idea of listening through witnessing the “testimony” of others, she goes on to say that testimony is “responding to the crisis of truth” (p. 166). She describes this as holding the listener to account and argues that “the listener plays a tremendous role in the production of truth, and the relations of power are thus foregrounded” (p. 168). However, I would suggest that educators must also consider that reorientation might not always result in a shift in worldviews toward social change, and instead may actually advance patriarchal norms and toxic masculine behaviours. Even when recognizing privilege as taking up space that should prioritize marginalized groups of people, there is perhaps an ontological desire for all people to be positioned as a subject in order for an activity to affirm a sense of self-consciousness. Bringing
together post-modernist feminism and hermeneutical realities raises the question: how do we mobilize men and boys to become not only involved in rejecting gender-based violence, but also invested in change?

**A Knowledge of Gender**

The study of knowledge is complex and diverse with various ontological and epistemological philosophical frameworks to consider. Theorists from multiple disciplines ranging from semiotics to neo-Kantian traditions have laid claim to the source of knowledge and the journey towards ‘truth’. However, one of the most pertinent questions in relation to knowledge is: how is knowledge utilized? Central to this question is the idea that knowledge has broader social, cultural, and political implications; however, even these structures are constructed, maintained, and performed by social actors with various degrees of agency, privilege, and experience. I agree with the idea that some level of agency can be utilized to either perpetuate or challenge dominant social structures; nevertheless, I subscribe to the idea that agency is situated within the context and limitations of power-knowledge relationships (Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1975/1995, 1976/1988). If one reflects on the role of agency, then it seems imperative that one should also consider the role of individual subjects and the perceptual relationships to knowledge that inform one’s understanding of being-in-the-world. The complexity and particularity of individual perception is taken up in Nietzsche’s idea of perspectivism. Nietzsche (1873/1976) reflects on perspective-based knowledge by stating:

> No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the concept of “leaf” is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from these individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions;
and now it gives rise to the idea that in nature there might be something besides the leaves which would be “leaf”—some kind of original form after which all leaves have been woven, marked, copied, colored, curled, and painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no copy turned out to be a correct reliable and faithful image of the original form. (p. 46, emphasis in original)

Perhaps, in the context of social justice education, there is value in mapping the disconnections and ruptures between the embodiment of masculine privileges and social justice education. Likely, Nietzsche would not deny that we live in a world full of similarity, familiarity, and common experiences that inform ideological and material conditions. However, the practice of interpretation disrupts the notion of any universal form due to the requirement that shared social conditions require performances that emerge through the expressions of individual subjects and intersubjective relationships. Wicks observes that perspectivism is characteristic of Nietzsche’s views on concepts such as truth and knowledge, suggesting that each individual is perceptually located as a human being in a specific time and culture, which guides our understanding of the world (2010, p. 45). Interpretation suggests that the world is available to us from where we are located, rather than from an objective perspective that comes from nowhere (Haraway, 1991). Where I disagree with Nietzsche’s observation is the assertion of absolute solipsism. The world is full of conventions of identity, stereotypes, and common ways of understanding what identities do and what identities mean. Perhaps these shared ideas cannot be universalized, but at the same time their commonality is influential. As argued by Yeo (1992) if there was no shared meaning “[c]ommunication would be an illusion and solipsism the order of the day” (p. 46). Even if these conventional conceptualizations of shared identity are incomplete or inaccurate, they matter by
way of the implications of the oppressive features that are included in normative performances of identity. However, these normative conventions are not rigid and unchanging, but rather are repeated and performed constructing the somewhat shared material world. Regardless of what constitutes a shared reality, normalization suggests that there is an implicit and assumed reality that humans operate within. This informs normative and conventional practices, yet cannot be expressed, performed, or understood within the consideration of one’s specific situation in-the-world.

Supporting my view on the difficulty of conceptualizing a universally shared reality, Haraway (1991) observes the objectivity fallacy as the “god-trick” or as “seeing everything from nowhere” (p. 189), which fails to recognize that one can only grasp knowledge of the world through their position as a perceptual and situated self. Haraway’s “god trick” refers to an understanding of the world that assumes objectivity, universalism, and absolute Truth. Importantly, these epistemological assumptions are used discursively to legitimize the current framework of social hierarchies. She goes on to argue that, “self-knowledge requires a semiotic-material technology linking meaning and bodies” (p. 192). One understands one’s self in the context of the assumed objective social materiality, yet one navigates the meaning of this situation as mediated through the body. Therefore, theories of knowledge require acknowledgment that one’s situated and perceptual relationships to knowledge include social signifiers as constructed through culture and language. At the same time, even concepts such as power have material consequences in the absence of an objective status. The specific ways that one is situated towards or away from certain knowledge, discourse, and information are “the view from a body, always complex, contradictory”, and the creation of the Self is an ongoing,
temporal, spatial project that is always shifting, fluid, and precarious (Haraway, 1991, p. 195). The concept of positioning knowledge presented both in Nietzsche and Haraway’s arguments suggest that, although an object of knowledge may be socially materialized, our subjective relationship to being or perceiving social objects is diverse, complex, and ultimately situated in the subject’s particular placement in the world which may not be absolutely unique, but nevertheless is distinct and precarious.

Understanding epistemology as situated suggests that interpretation and perception have a significant influence over how one understands the social conditions of the material world. When mapping knowledge through a hermeneutical perspective, getting from point A to point B is mediated through interpretation. The study of hermeneutics addresses questions concerning language, reflection, and the inability to achieve an objective perspective on a given topic (Gallagher, 1992). Furthermore, hermeneutical analysis describes how the world is constructed from the perspective of the “embodied interpreter” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 3). This is taken up by Heidegger (1988/1999)—who has completed many works on the subject of hermeneutics in relation to phenomenology—as reflecting on communication or “interpreting of facticity in which facticity is being encountered, grasped, and expressed in concepts” (p. 11). According to Heidegger, “hermeneutics—as this object’s presumed mode of access—clearly shows that this object has its being as something capable of interpretation and in need of interpretation and that to be in some state of having-been-interpreted belongs to its being” (p. 11). Therefore, interpretation is ontologically characteristic of the human condition, and one cannot access information about the world without interpreting it through the mediation of the body. Humans in their own ‘beingness’ do not have access to the world without the conditions of interpreting it
for themselves, and also being interpreted for them by the Other. What can be said about the ontological character of Heidegger’s analysis of hermeneutics is that the results of analysis provide data on understanding how utilizing knowledge connects A to B. Through hermeneutical analysis, one encounters reflections as “biased by prejudgments, authority-structures, and distorted communication practices” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 9). When judgments and bias are made explicit in power analysis, there is an opportunity to explore beyond the structures of power. One can understand how power materializes in rhetoric, how it is conditioned in confirmation bias, and how biases that represent perceived Truths are a barrier for epistemological transformation. This perspective acknowledges that one is never “in complete control of conversations” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 8). Instead, our interactions are inter-subjective and can be represented as a synthesis of social symbols as constructed by one’s self and others. As a consequence of this relationship, communication is the precarious space where the social and the perceptual merge.

Communication as situated across difference may perhaps be in itself a precarious activity in its ontological form, which suggests a possible reality of multiple and diverse ontologies. Hermeneutical reasoning suggests that “communication remains always imperfect and incomplete” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 5). Gallagher reflects on the works of both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger through the utilization of the hermeneutical circle. According to Gallagher, “[w]e find ourselves always within the hermeneutical circle in which contexts condition perspectives and perspectives condition contexts” (p. 5). Neither can be reduced to the other, yet they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, context and perception rely on one another in projects of materializing knowledge. In practice, one finds themselves navigating both the social and the
perpetual accounts of experience, which Gallagher argues takes form as “assimilation, accommodation, appropriation, and transcendence” (p. 7). These forms designate the conditions imposed on both agency and possibilities for change, not only in form, but also in intentionality.

Hermeneutical thinking also observes that one cannot essentialize the post-modernist perspective or the phenomenological perspective as the sole framework for knowledge construction and acquisition. Hermeneutics “cannot disassociate itself from hermeneutics precisely because even postmodern understanding is a human enterprise that is hermeneutically situated” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 11). Therefore, the relationship between the postmodernist-performative perspective and the phenomenological-hermeneutical positions exist as a synthesis, or at the least, emerges relationally through the perspective that existence precedes essence (Stoller, 2010). However, one cannot dismiss the importance of cultural constructions of language in the formation of perceptual experience. According to Gallagher, “language remains the ‘medium of the hermeneutic experiences” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 73). Paradoxically, one needs some form of linguistic or cultural object available to perceive in order to complete an interpretive task, yet the reiteration of that interpretive task needs a method for communicating the object’s form in relation to seemingly collective knowledge. Therefore, it seems redundant to prioritize either the personal or the social, as both these situations are dependent on each other in knowledge construction and communication.

**Situated in Orientation**

The final section of this chapter provides a conceptual synthesis of Butler’s performativity and Merleau-Ponty’s expression as a pedagogical concept for communication across difference
through a socially informed phenomenological method for mapping the experience of identity. Sara Ahmed’s theoretical concepts are used to build a pedagogical map of masculine experience and how this relates to a knowledge of identity, which will be modelled in the final chapter. Ahmed’s theories on orientation not only provide a method for mapping experience, but also demonstrates the capacity to merge both post-modernist and phenomenological methodologies.

Ahmed observes that the concept of orientation “avoids the false choice between discourse, norms, and power on one hand, and bodies, emotions, and lived experience on the other” (as cited in Berggren, 2014, p. 245). This directs my discussion towards an understanding of how lived knowledge of masculinity is situated as a relational process between the social and one’s internal sense of self. The pedagogical implications of this synthesis aims to create room for diverse subjectivities in social justice education by situating learners in spatial and temporal locations of knowledge and experience. It is not that learners should not strive to disrupt their assumptions contained in their subjectivity and relations of power. Rather, an account of personal knowledge and experience help educators to understand what is available at point A—the point of current embodiments of knowledge—and what pedagogical strategies can move a learner towards point B—point B being the goals of social justice education. Ahmed defines orientation as knowing where you are “when you turn this way or that way” (2006, p. 1). Being oriented or knowing where one is dependent on nearness, habit, familiarity, and repetition, which include both one’s subjective experience, but also the social structures and relationships that inform those experiences (Ahmed, 2006). Changes in the embodiment of knowledge are premised on not only on these aforementioned factors of orientation, but also moments of disorientation and reorientation as the metrics for understanding the potentiality of change.
Orientation as understood as a method of hermeneutical navigation identifies the pathways of one’s own history experiences in relation to the public discourse of the shared world.

“Orientations are binding as they bind objects together” (Ahmed, 2006, p.88), unveiling one’s pathways towards the future and lines that represent the pathways of the past. Therefore, it is one’s personal history of social experience that informs their situation. Ahmed conceptualizes one’s in-the-world situation of the individual as the “dwelling places” of bodies and Beingness (Ahmed, 2006, p. 8; Heidegger, 1988/1999). Dwelling places are where one finds oneself, where one currently is, and where one may feel at home. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical position connects to Ahmed’s use of phenomenology as situated in presentness. According to Ahmed, "[p]erception hence involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things" (2006 p. 27). Indeed, it is of great importance to consider the temporal and spatial qualities of one’s experience of being-in-the-world.

Orientation is also conditioned by affect-based responses in relation to the perceived stability of one’s situation. One moves towards certain objects and away from others (Ahmed, 2006). Orientation then is not only about what is reachable, but also what is comfortable and what is familiar. The decisions that one makes about understanding their own identity is dependent on the ability to make decisions that allow one to remain oriented. According to Ahmed (2006), doing orientation is:

“work [involving] a direction towards the object, which then works for us. The failure of work is not then, ‘in’ the thing, or ‘in’ the person but rather is about whether the person and the thing face each other in the right way.” (p. 51, emphasis in original)
Orientation is also perceived in relation to representational social identities, intersubjective relationships, and shared discourse. Orientation is not merely an internal process of identity formation, but instead, is always in relation to how one is situated in one’s particular situation of social status and conditions. According to Ahmed (2006), there is a “political requirement that we turn some ways and not others. We follow the line that is followed by others: the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which ‘we’ emerge” (p. 15, emphasis in original). She argues that orientations are not exclusive to one’s internal idea of Self, but also constructed socially and politically as “some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others” (p. 11). From my perspective, all people will experience spaces differently depending on how they orient within that space insofar as the space that one inhabits can also be distant, unwelcoming, and an oppressive situation.

Orientation is not static and one’s orientation has the tendency to be disrupted. Disorientation is the experience when one’s place of dwelling or orientation is disrupted. Ahmed describes this “as the failure of an organization to hold things in place” (p. 158). She observes that moments of disorientation can “shatter one’s sense of confidence,” and these moments can be “unsettling” (p. 157). Ahmed describes disorientation as a sense of loss, losing our way, our grounding, and our familiarity. “It can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence or shaped by violence directed towards the body” (p. 160). However, disorientation can also be subtle and nuanced. According to Ahmed (2006):

It is not that disorientation is always radical. Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to reground and reorientate their relation to the world. So, too, the forms of politics that proceed from
disorientation can be conservative, depending on the ‘aims’ of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves. (p. 158, emphasis in original)

What results from these moments of disorientation depends on what resources are available as one attempts to reorient themselves (Ahmed, 2006). A person who benefits from the current social order may perhaps be more likely to reorient towards the familiar or what is comfortable, likely towards social norms rather than being open-minded enough to explore the world in a reflexive or critical way. From this perspective, one is inclined to retreat towards a path already previously travelled, a path towards dwelling in familiarity. In moments of disorientation, one is perhaps inclined to feel uneasy, dizzy, and outside one’s self, scrambling to locate a path that affirms one’s perceived sense of self.

Moments of reorientation are when one is put back on a seemingly stable and self-affirming pathway. In reorientation, one returns to what they perceive to be their place of being or dwelling. Ahmed (2006) describes reorientation as moments where objects or encounters “no longer appear as if they are ‘off centre’ or ‘slantwise’” (p. 65, emphasis in original). Reorientation can be understood as perceptual stabilization, finding clarity in moments of dizziness, a return to the historically perceived understanding of one’s self. Ahmed states the reorientation is a historical practice insofar as an individual can “point to the future only insofar as it inherits the past, as an accumulation of what the body has already done, as well as what is ‘behind’ the body, the conditions of its arrival” (p. 159, emphasis in original). From my perspective, Ahmed’s observation does not suggest that one’s history exclusively determines their movement towards the future. Instead, these moments between disorientation and
reorientation are opportunities where a change in perspective can occur, while at the same time recognizing that one’s lived history is highly influential in one’s decision making process towards the future. Ahmed asserts that the “work of reorientation needs to be made visible as a form of work”, which suggests that orientation, disorientation, and reorientation have both epistemological and pedagogical implications (p. 100). As one attempts to re-orient themselves in moments of disorientation, one makes decisions related to how they might move towards the future. What is influential in these existential moments are conditions of both familiarity and habit, and in these moments, one is perhaps more likely to reorient towards what is already known and the pathways one has already travelled on historically. If one can dwell in a new space that is reorienting, there is a potential for change, new and stabilizing pathways emerge, and one’s sense of self has the potential to transforms one’s perceptual epistemological situation.

Orientation is not explicitly characterized as a reflective process; rather, reflective investment in certain pathways can result in other possibilities being hidden from view (Ahmed, 2006). What is hidden from one’s subjective view is informed by the conditions of normalcy being understood as both familiar and available. Familiarity is “feeling at home… the familiar is shaped by actions that reach out towards objects that are already in reach” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). She states that moments of disorientation must acknowledge that the “work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar” (p. 7). Indeed, the familiar perpetuates the dialectical understanding of differentiation as oppositional and “the familiar is ‘extended’ by differentiating itself from the strange, by making what seems strange […] transforming ‘what is strange into an instrument’” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 117, emphasis in original). Therefore, and as discussed in the previous chapter, the connection between strangeness and
othering allows the mechanisms of oppression to be justified, not only as a way of legitimizing social oppression, but is also misunderstood as fundamental to the project of affirming one’s own ontological situation.

**Stickiness**

Ahmed’s observations on familiarity combines the habits of the body and socialized understandings of one’s identity. The familiar is an inheritance of habit materialized through performances of social normalcy. What one acquires as habit is in relation to what one has inherited historically and the condition that “delimits the objects that we might come into contact with” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 124). What is in reach becomes the habitual, and the habitual becomes one’s sense of truth, one’s source of knowledge of ‘how the world works’, and one’s typical space of dwelling in normalcy. “Reachability is hence an effect of the habitual, in the sense that what is reachable depends on what bodies ‘take in’ as objects that extend their bodily mobility, becoming like a second skin” (Ahmed p. 131, emphasis in original). The familiar is where one tends to be oriented; it is not explicitly rigid, yet there is a tendency for people to want to experience their *beingness* in a space that is orienting. This second skin is one’s beingness-in-the-world, or how we exist as objects that reinforce and inform social norms.

Being situated in the habitual can be represented not only as where one is oriented for themselves, but also can be represented as distance from the Other. “Distance is here the expression of a certain loss, of the loss of grip over an object” (Ahmed, 2006, p.166), an inability to understand the Other. I would add that distance can also be applied to knowledge that exists outside of one’s own situation of beingness, and that status of the Other may appear as different or strange from one’s own place of dwelling. The embodiment of the Otherness is “of not only
difference, but distance” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 121). Distance not only creates space between individuals, but also limits access to knowledge. Distance also contributes to conflict when a particular orientation informs one’s perception of truth, especially when this is taken up differently depending on one’s particular intersections of identity. For example, in the context of race, Ahmed describes “whiteness as a bad habit: a series of actions that are repeated, [and] forgotten” (p. 129). This is also true in the context of masculinities insofar as the repetition of patriarchal norms becomes forgotten to the extent that these bad habits become one’s truth. At the same time, marginalized individuals might also find the normative social framework disorienting. Dwelling in what is considered a familiar space for the dominant group may perhaps be strange, disorientating, and oppressive. Therefore, how one experiences the world is dependent on how one is oriented in relation to oppression and privilege which makes an exploration of understanding knowledge a difficult task.

Ahmed suggests that normative orientations are related to what she defines as stickiness, being a methodological marker that is useful for bringing together the concepts of assemblage, expression, performativity, orientation, and situated knowledge. Stickiness can be understood as an analogy for social influences being identified as an adhesive or glue that orients one towards both the familiar and the socially normative. Stickiness, broadly speaking, refers to one’s particular life histories. It is our space of dwelling or what ‘feels like home’, which is informed through the synthesis of social symbols and personal perceptions. This suggests that there are limitations on agency due to regulatory social practices and performances that are highly influential over one’s understanding of the world. My arrival at Ahmed’s theory of stickiness, demonstrates why some aspects of social justice education work towards social change better than others. First, not all people aiming to end misogyny, gender inequality, and gender-based
violence will take up this work in the same way or view social justice education through the same lens. People from dominant social locations, might not perceive gender inequality as an issue at all. One’s knowledge of social justice is intertwined with personal history and experience. Therefore, the capacity to achieve the various goals of social justice is somewhat dependent on the types of people you are working with, how they interpret their identity, and the social consequences that come with the embodiment of a certain identity—such as the embodiment of maleness and social privilege.

Stickiness is about the pathways already taken, and how these pathways lead one towards a certain understanding or worldview. According to Ahmed (2006) “actions that bodies ‘tend to do’ are effects of history rather than being originary” (p. 56, emphasis in original). Mapping stickiness brings the familiar into view, providing a method for understanding how one interprets encounters with and embodiments of knowledge. It describes one’s personal hermeneutical situation and how they interpret knowledge. Ahmed offers the analogy “a sticky object, what it picks up on its surface ‘shows’ where it has travelled and what it has come into contact with” (p. 40, emphasis in original). Therefore, what is constituted as ‘sticky’ provides useful information about one’s identity and one’s hermeneutical reality in relation to norms, repetition, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge.

Stickiness is also present in moments or in orientation and disorientation. First, what sticky is in the broader sense exists in relation to systems of power and domination. Ahmed asserts that the “ground into which we sink our feet is not neutral: it gives ground to some more than others” (2006, p. 160). Sticky ground is situated in social norms and power. Rewards, domination,
punishments, and subordination make certain social conditions orientating for some and
disorientating for others. Second, stickiness moves us towards or away from certain pathways
based on what one interprets as orientation (Ahmed, 2006). She goes on to say that
“[d]isorientation occurs when we fail to sink into the ground, which means the ‘ground’ itself is
disturbed” (p. 160, emphasis in original). Alternatively, one may stick to a new orientation
because a sense of dwelling is achieved through a willingness to engage with an alternative
orientation of masculine identity.

The concept of stickiness also has implications for agency. From my perspective, stickiness can
be understood as individual subjects stomping through the thick mud of social influences and
norms. People have the ability to make choices, but our agency is limited by the incredibly thick
mud of influential social conditions that influences which pathways lead one towards an
orientating status. This experimental understanding of fluidity presents an image of viscosity,
signifying both the limitations of agency and the superincumbent conditions of power and
inequality.

The concept of stickiness not only allows for a synthesis of social and perceptual perspectives,
but also permits an integrated approach for utilizing both performativity and phenomenological
theory. Kalle Berggren utilizes Ahmed’s theories in the context of masculinities studies, and he
reflects on Ahmed’s theory of stickiness by observing that her work “combines the post-
structuralist point about subjects being positioned by competing discourses with
phenomenological insights about how we are shaped by our lived experience” (2014, p. 233).
Berggren’s work observes the limited scope of how scholars have taken up masculinities historically, and suggests broadening the theoretical tools that are used to conceptualize masculinities. In agreement with Berggren’s observations, masculinities studies have only picked up certain pieces of feminist theory while leaving out other vital concepts (2014). Berggren makes use of stickiness through the lens of masculinity, which provides a way of mapping the relationship between personal epistemologies of embodied maleness and how masculinities are understood in the social world. Berggren suggests that what sticks is a marker of what one has experienced and learned, and how one perceives the world (2014). Stickiness is not a rigid mechanism; rather, stickiness directs and orients how masculinities are understood by male subjects moving from the past to the present and into the future. In Berggren’s (2014) review of stickiness, he reflects on Salisbury and Jackson (1996) as some of the few theorists examining masculinity through a lens that acknowledges the precarious relationship between subjects and social positions:

Boys aren’t just brainwashed by macho values. They don’t just swallow the dominant models of manliness in a docile, passive manner. Instead, they have a much more wry, contradictory approach—half mocking, half accepting—both contesting and buying into these models. (p. 13)

From the perspective that masculinities are sticky but not fixed, challenging problematic masculinities requires navigating epistemological spaces of uncertainty, perceptual diversity and even contradiction. Therefore, there is a need to develop models of learning that conceptualize
how to navigate hermeneutical inconsistencies, models that perhaps cannot be achieved by either phenomenology, power analysis, or post-structuralism independently.

A more comprehensive approach to education on the topic of masculinities requires a synthesis of phenomenological, performative, and hermeneutical philosophical frameworks in the formulation social justice pedagogy. This interdisciplinary and intentionally eclectic method of practice allows for a response that addresses dismantling regulatory power structures, yet acknowledge how these power structures tend to be understood as they are perceptually experienced. Indeed, one should not ignore the importance of locating and dismantling patriarchal conditions and I have argued that these are essential features to any thoughtful form of social justice education. However, through the inclusion of hermeneutical and phenomenological accounts, educators can begin to unpack how power is both perceived and understood by men and boys on the basis of the lived experiences of maleness. If scholarly pursuits in the field of gender studies demonstrate a willingness to understand how distinct embodiments of masculinities are positioned in relation to knowledge, then insight could be gained into exploring how change needs to be taken up when specifically working with privileged men and boys as a way of fostering their accountability for their positions of both privilege and domination.

Understanding privilege can be taken up in at least two ways. First, one can explore how men understand the conditions of social power in their own lives, which will uncover ignorance, assumptions, and judgments that conceal the systemic qualities of domination found in a patriarchal society. Second, and as an educational practice, one can work towards change by
beginning at a place that is both reachable and familiar, and creating new spaces of maleness through the use of anti-oppressive learning. From this point of departure, one can uncover the mechanisms of ignorance, the disorientation of the Self experienced in critical explorations of identity, and the possibilities that can be used to reconstruct both healthy and non-violent models of maleness and perhaps masculinities for the future. Moving from the experience of disorientation to reorientation when exploring masculinity in novel ways begins at point A. Perhaps, moving to point B is an activity that involves a method of disorientation that disrupts one’s understanding of what gender does, but that could be framed as working towards an alternative experience of embodying maleness that is self-fulfilling and affirming, accountable, empathetic, and self-reflexive.

The literature I have reviewed on the topics of masculinities often neglects the importance of a sense of self, or has at least failed to provide a synthesis of one’s personal psychology in the context of discursive systems and social symbols. Many scholars I encountered and cited in this inquiry have suggested a need to expand the theoretical landscape of masculinities studies, yet at the same time few have ventured into the rich and diverse theories of feminism beyond the scope of post-modernist power analysis. Perhaps not all feminist theories would be useful in the context of masculinities as an advantage to the larger goals of the feminist movement. Furthermore, it is unlikely that all theories in the field of gender studies would be applicable to working with men who embody diverse characteristics of masculinity. However, theoretical experimentation may have a lot to offer emerging social justice pedagogies, especially when considering the human urge—or perhaps the need—to express self-consciousness, position one’s self ontologically, and to exist in a space of orientation as a necessary part of Being. If educators
are unwilling to explore embodiments and interpretations of maleness, then a likely result will be limitations for where and how change can occur in the lives of men and boys.

The exploration that has unfolded in the first three chapters demonstrates both the importance of lived experiences and social conditions that inform gender identity. What masculinity *is* depends on how one’s other intersections of identity signifiers inform one’s self-concept of embodying maleness. Furthermore, what masculinity intends to *do* depends on what one considers to be their perceived and ontological sense of self-determined truth. The embodiment of both privilege and marginalization within an individual makes the ability to change complex and messy, especially when one considers how issues like colonization or gender-fluid identities complicate what is to be the goal of emancipatory efforts and how bodies simultaneously can resist and conform in the precarious situation of being both subjects and objects and oppressors and oppressed. Furthermore, one may consider how aware people are of progressive gender politics, especially for those who inhabit spaces of privilege and ignorance. In the final chapter of this thesis, I begin to look at the types of knowledge that men stick to, and the types of experiences that locate how males are positioned towards social justice discourse. I will not arrive at a concrete model, framework, or formula—and perhaps even attempting to do so would neglect the fluid, diverse, and precarious nature of gender identities as a broader topic. However, what I intend to offer is a push in a new direction where one’s situation from their subjective perspective is the point of departure for both learning and the capacity for involvement in emancipatory change.
Chapter 4: Inhabiting Spaces of Not Knowing

Somewhere in between the status of toxic, hegemonic, dominant, alternative and transformative masculinities, men and boys tend to dwell in a negative space of beingness. The precariousness of this status is due both to its inability to embody an absolute hegemonic form, and also the lack of possible positive models for how transformative masculinities could and should materialize. These masculine spaces of dwelling are seemingly positioned in between two oppositional perspectives: the maintenance of the status quo and social transformation through social justice practices. Returning to the preliminary discussion of hegemonic masculinity as described by Connell, hegemonic embodiment in an absolute sense is rarely if ever attainable (2005). Maleness comes with inadequacies, shortfalls, and failures both in masculine forms for and against hegemonic signifiers. Patriarchal hegemony also impacts the embodiment of masculinities through processes of interpellation by the Other, and, even in cases where one’s worldviews align with social justice discourse and values, the creation of the masculine concept of identity is also negotiated and understood as a social activity. In the case of the masculine object, masculinities as signified by the Other are often represented negatively through various theoretical lenses such as feminism, critical race theory, decolonization theory and other social justice paradigms. Critiques of dominant masculinities are often related to toxic qualities such as violence, use of power, control, privilege, and taking up space in cultures of change. It is not that these critiques are inaccurate in their assessments; rather, these types of critiques have failed to conceptualize any concrete or comprehensive alternative to performances of hegemonic masculinity. Alternatives to traditional forms of masculinity are instead scattered throughout various perspectives included in social justice discourse, but fail to be materialized into a cohesive framework of what alternative masculinities may be.
Masculinities as a Negative Space

Usage of the signifier *negative space* is positioned from the view of the perceiving individual and how self-recognition is taken up within a shared social, cultural, and political situation. It is the ability or inability to orient one’s self somewhere in a manner that is ontologically significant. What constitutes a negative space might look vastly different from individual to individual across various experiences and backgrounds. However, I have identified four metrics that might be useful for conceptualizing the status of masculinities somewhere between the hegemonic and the transformative. Opposition, ignorance, complacency, and possibility all emerged as metrics of analysis in my research that seemed to represent the experience of masculinities in relation to knowledge. These chosen metrics are not exhaustive nor are they complete. They may not be workable for all embodiments of identity and do require further study, critique, and improvement. However, these signifiers serve as a point of access to understanding masculine hermeneutics and may be a fruitful point of departure for understanding barriers to challenging problematic relationships in the context of gender.

Of great importance is the acknowledgment that the status of masculinities is posited precariously. Experience, temporality, power, information, perception, and many other signifiers used to conceptualize the lived world are constantly connecting, disconnecting, shifting, and emerging. Therefore, utilizing terms such as ignorance as a catchall lacks insight into the nuances of how knowledge operates. Therefore, I am cautiously proceeding with the use of these metrics for locating knowledge by carefully defining these terms and their implications through the documented experiences of maleness. According to DeNicola (2017), space needs to be made for acknowledging “known knowns, known unknowns, unknown unknowns, and unknown
knowns” as the various conditions that locate both knowledge and ignorance (p. 40). These observations on the status of knowledge and ignorance suggest that what is constituted a knowledge of masculinity is sometimes hidden from view, sometimes intentional, and in other cases knowledge is completely unrecognized. This is not to excuse problematic expressions of masculinities, but instead suggests that what is hidden from view is not accounted for in one’s self-knowledge. The opportunity for change is not visible or situated in one’s place of dwelling, and access to change is often distant or even unknown. In the context of social change, learning must go beyond the identification of social problems. Learning needs to brings distant solutions into view.

I define my analysis of acts of learning as the synthesis of the individual, the social, the epistemological and the perceptual. Bringing these four considerations for learning together is not only a synthesis of theoretical perspectives, but also a synthesis of individuals and group dynamics. Combining Deleuzian mapping with Ahmed’s theory of orientation, I envision a conceptual framework that constructs pedagogical conditions that enable learning to be brought to the learner. This concept is by no means a universal method of connecting men and boys to critical learning, but is a way of bringing the distant into view. This approach requires the same rigor that conventional socialization utilizes to construct our current systems of gender norms. Change, in similarity to the status quo, requires rigorous and impactful repetition and investment (Butler, 1993). Change requires a synthesis of repetition, access to information, and commitment situated in a precarious and fluid situation of navigating assemblages that both reinforce conformity and provide opportunities for change.
Precarity and Open-Mindedness

The need for repetition acknowledges the precarity of emancipatory projects and the sort of commitment that is required given the wide influence of regulatory systems that social justice is meant to challenge. Precarity suggests that relational, contextual, and hermeneutical conditions are both diverse and fluid. Our shared social situation is always shifting and moving, and therefore, so are both potential problems and solutions. Precarity not only demonstrates why an ‘objective’ lens is problematic, but this also suggests that change requires continual action that is often re-evaluated and reconfigured. According to Gallagher (1992) “our praxis cannot aim at a revolution which would result in absolute emancipation, or definitive solutions to human problems; rather, it must be a praxis of “unremitting virtu” because the ambiguity is unremitting” (authors emphasis, p. 10). Many of my own contributions are in some ways ambiguous, biased, idealistic, and perhaps appear to be relativist. Instead, I perceive this as a willingness to engage in open-mindedness. Hare (2005) describes open-mindedness as being “erroneously linked with relativism, abandonment of principles, [and] general skepticism”; he goes on to say that “[t]hese theories, however, ignore the fact that open-mindedness is perfectly compatible with firm belief and decisive action” (p. 17). This is precisely why my thesis makes no explicit claims to Truth and does not identify any specific way of arriving at change as a singular destination. Instead, these decisions encourage the reader, the researcher, the activist, or the educator to determine when and how these ideas are useful for projects that aim to create change by employing the approach of open-mindedness.

To conceptualize open-mindedness, hooks (2005) uses the phrase “will to change” as a point of departure for rethinking masculinities. This is a nuanced and complex task insofar as identifying
a pedagogy to produce change through the lens of the will must also become a personally meaningful project, a project that can be repeated in a fashion that makes alternative performativity impactful to one’s self-knowledge. When reflecting on the ability to engage with social change discourse, there are those individuals who have had life experiences that allow them to understand why a movement towards social justice matters. These are the individuals who seem to get it. From this perspective, the opportunity or the need for social change is both in view and accessible. Instead, my idea of change is aimed towards those who are complacent or ignorant in their masculine performances, those who maintain and comply with violent and hierarchal relationships across genders. Pragmatically, shifting normalized masculine behaviour leads the discussion towards metaphysical questions such as: how does one change the hearts and minds of men; and how does one engage privileged males to become interested in change if there is little or no interest in doing so?

The question how should educators understand masculinities in the context of social justice education is directed towards this normative or privileged learner as their experience relates to the acquisition of knowledge. Specifically, I want to attempt to understand how to get privileged learners interested and engaged in a critical understanding of masculinities when the opportunity to engage with a knowledge of change perhaps seems so distant from their experiences. It seems to me that meeting people where they find themselves and then moving them towards a more critical view using social justice pedagogy is a vital way of transitioning from ignorance or knowledge in bad faith to a status of credible and thoughtful knowledge. To be clear, I am not suggesting that social justice education explicitly makes space for ignorance, but instead acknowledges that it does in fact, exist as a barrier to change. Working with ignorance is a messy
space that Butler (2006) describes as a “fear of understanding a point of view [that] belies a deeper fear that we shall be taken up by it, find it is contagious, become infected in a moral perilous way by the thinking of the presumed enemy” (p. 8). It is precarious to do work in this seemingly oppositional space: a space that may threaten the very goals that social justice aims to achieve. At the same time, there is value in understanding why people subscribe to exclusionary thinking and practices if the goal of change is to transform these problematic attitudes. Although ignorant perspectives are both problematic and exclusionary, they may be near to where many males find themselves to be oriented and are the point of departure from where the process of change may begin. Ignorance is a barrier to social change. Indeed, including privileged individuals in projects of social change is messy, but if the goal of social change is to dismantle dominant and oppressive structures then it is also likely that this will require shifting the perspectives of people in positions of dominance. I would suggest that the inclusion of privileged males in social justice spaces is about setting well thought out boundaries. These boundaries could be understood as taking measures to ensure that the structures of marginalization are not extended to social justice spaces. Thinking about how one perceives getting from a starting point to their destination can demonstrate what is required for change-based learning and how to direct males towards the possibilities for seriously addressing gender-based violence in a comprehensive manner.

Masculinities are of course not a new topic of academic discussion; however, masculinities as a specified and formal discipline within gender studies is a relatively recent phenomenon. The pedagogy within masculinities studies often borrows from feminist frameworks, yet in itself is limited in comparison to the scope of feminist thinking and theory. As discussed in Chapter One,
post-structuralist literature that explicitly explores the embodiment of masculinities studies is somewhat non-existent. These limitations include both explicit theoretical perspectives, and especially empirical research on the experiences of males who engage in social justice education. In fact, it was difficult to find anything academic and peer-reviewed that would assist me in exploring these questions through evidence-based research. I suggest that the latter would be an essential development for understanding what pedagogy of masculinities may accomplish in the future. Collecting my own qualitative data of this nature is beyond the scope of this particular inquiry, yet would likely be a necessary next step for understanding more about the relationship between the embodiment of masculinities and knowledge. Given these limitations, I turn towards community-based research to explore how ignorance, complacency, opposition, and possibility intersect with the embodiment of maleness and a knowledge of masculinities.

Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) completed a community-based study entitled “Engaging men in gender initiatives: What change agents need to know”. Their work explores ways in which social justice is interpreted and understood by men who engage in gender equity programming. The qualitative data collected in this research is derived from interviews with thirty-five men from Canada, the United States, Norway, and South Africa. Most of these men are reported as being in upper or middle management positions in corporate or business oriented work settings. Most also report being married, heterosexual, and having children (Prime and Moss-Racusin, 2009). It would be fair to suggest that this study recruited cis-male and heterosexual participants and most likely many of these participants would likely fit into the general character of dominant male positions that has been discussed throughout this thesis. I recognize that I cannot account for the academic character of the research methods themselves, as the researchers provided limited
information on methodology and techniques of analysis. Therefore, I use the data collected by Prime and Moss-Racusin in my own exploration both cautiously and anecdotally. What can be explored through their research project is a general account of the relationship between masculinities and social justice education, aiding in the development of pedagogical methods based on my own metrics of analysis including opposition, complacency, ignorance, and future possibilities.

As previously mentioned, research on how men and boys engage in feminist and related pedagogies that includes hermeneutical analysis is something that seemingly did not exist when I initially began research on this topic. Recently, and because of the prevalence of the #metoo movement, I have decided to confirm that this was still the case. What has emerged since my initial research review is the work of Erin Casey (2017) and Schmitz and Kazyak (2016). Not unlike Prime and Moss-Racusin’s community-based research, these studies provide accounts of men’s experiences of participating in anti-violence and feminist informed programming, yet again the analysis found collectively in these works does not speak to specific pedagogical frameworks, relationships to discourse, and the locating of personal epistemologies. Furthermore, they do not offer a post-structuralist perspective on these issues and provide very limited accounts of qualitative data. However, what these studies can collectively provide is support for the idea that the perceptions found in Prime and Moss-Racusin’s work is akin to the results found elsewhere as this sort of research becomes more prevalent within the field of gender studies and education.
The application of opposition, complacency, ignorance, and possibilities to Prime and Moss-Racusin’s research is valuable for mapping the relationship between knowledge and experiences. Generally describing these four parameters of analysis will be taken up in the following order: First, masculinity as opposition refers to both objectification of other gender positions through the hegemonic masculine lens while simultaneously assessing masculinities as the object—for the Other—in resistance-based discourse. The term opposition comes out my discussion in Chapter Two on Hegelian dialectics and negation. I define opposition as point of conflict and divisiveness that emerge in relationships across differences. I will be exploring how opposition materializes through actions, perceptions, and discourse. Second, masculine subjects are often complacent as being recipients of the patriarchal dividend. Challenging these conditions of privilege would suggest a movement away from complacent practices and attitudes in order to be impactful. Third, masculinities as a form of knowledge will be assessed through mechanisms of ignorance which disguise patriarchal conditions within a culture of normalcy. Finally, masculinity has possibilities for new ontological positioning if the three other criteria can be addressed in a way that is both in reach and reorientating in the context of knowledge. The remainder of this chapter will explore these conditions and the implications that these conditions have on education that is designed to address gender-based violence.

Opposition

In previous chapters, I have spoken about negation in the context of philosophical assumptions, yet philosophical negation also has pedagogical implications because it is oppositional by design. From my perspective, the metric of negation leads to perceived opposition or oppositional activities. Similarly, in Ahmed’s work on disorientation, she observes that if something does not
align with one’s ontological situation they “turn towards it in a different way” (2006, p. 50).

Through the lens of opposition, there is a relationship between negation, distance, knowledge, and differentiation. In extreme cases, opposition has horrendously violent implications. Paradoxically, masculinities are simultaneously the object of counter-discourse and the performers of domination. The synthesis of the subject-object experience has problematic implications for social hierarchies, emancipatory change, and working across differences in the context of social justice. In some cases, men who engage with gender-violence education might reject what is offered because they are unable to situate themselves in these discussions of change. In Casey et al. (2017), one study participant reflects on his anti-violence workshop experiences and suggests that “workshops talk at men rather than bringing them into the conversations” (p. 987). Perhaps, this type of expressed disembodiment can lead to men and boys becoming fearful, defensive, or judgmental when engaging in spaces meant for social change. This results in the potential for men to be situated outside of, or as objects of the broader discussion of gender-based violence.

Being excluded, rather then being oriented within discussions of social justice may risk leading men and boys towards other alternatives. Unfortunately, some of these alternatives can include groups such as men’s rights activist organizations, and the growing and evolving ‘alt-right’ movement. Even worse, if men fail to find a space of orientation, alternatives can present as violent and sociopathic orientations as an attempt to enact agency. A failure to engage males in social justice education may have a massive impact on the ability of resistance groups to dismantle patriarchal structures. Furthermore, there is a risk that males might resent rejection from engagement in social justice projects, which might actually lead to furthering recruitment
for men’s rights activist groups, or ‘alt-right’ activities. In fact, this is again a messy situation where participation might infringe on the space of marginalized people, yet at the same time exclusion may direct male individuals towards activities that perpetuate gender-based violence. Participation in change requires a comprehensive effort that acknowledges that men and boys are also survivors of patriarchal conditions and change needs to address spaces to enable healing and alternatives for men and boys (hooks, 2005). Maleness, if represented as a totality, goes beyond the explicit status of oppressor, especially when we consider oppression as an assemblage of entangled experiences that includes both privilege and oppression experienced by a single individual. According to hooks (2005) to “label them [men] as oppressors and dismiss them meant we never had to give a voice to the gaps in our understanding or to talk about maleness in complex ways” (p. xvi). This suggests that there is value not only in talking to men about their experiences of masculinity, but also in change as a method requiring combining experiential narratives with concepts such as power, ideology, and social inequality. hooks argues that “[m]en cannot change if there is no blueprint for change. Men cannot love if they are not taught the art of loving” (2005, p. xvii). Therefore, a pedagogy of change requires participation by men and boys in spaces where alternatives to masculine stereotypes can be learnt and shared leading to the development of possible alternatives to hegemonic masculinity.

From my perspective, hooks is perhaps considering Freire’s idea that change must be approached through a humanizing framework. If the method of change leads to divisiveness, then it is likely that opposition-based discourse will continue into the future of learning, even if it manifests in different formulations of dialectical relationships. Freire (1970/1992) takes this up through the notion of “sub-oppressors”, where the oppressed—in bad faith—use oppressive strategies on
other oppressed people that create the illusion of achieved liberation (pp. 29-30). As an alternative to opposition, addressing gender-based violence means that men should be actively involved in change and educators should attempt to understand what barriers contribute to both exclusion and disinterest. Education on the topic of gender-based violence needs a framework that is not just about the problems of patriarchal forms of masculinities. Instead, it requires the ability to propose and model how alternative and healthy expressions of maleness can be embodied, lived, and learned. This requires not only a shift in the perceptual and epistemological accounts of difference, but also a critical understanding of both signifiers and definitions of what constitutes a gender identity, not just for men, but people of all genders. This observes that oppositional differences can be taken up in a couple of ways, including negation from the perspective of the male subject and from the position of the masculine object— as one’s identity is formed both internally, but also in-the-world. Masculinities, as an object of analysis, is both observed as being a set of regulatory performances within male-identified communities and also within communities where masculinities are the object of resistance-based learning.

As an example of in-group regulatory practices, Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) reflect on the narrative of one employee moving to part-time work in an effort to achieve a better work-life balance. He was shamed by his peers, and reports that “[p]eople made jokes about me. When I came back [full-time] a year or two after, they asked whether I was still breastfeeding” (p. 7). In this case, the use of peer shaming is an effort to regulate one’s behaviour that is traditionally considered to be feminine—which is traditionally meant to signify weakness. From a theoretical perspective, sex role theory is widely discredited (Connell, 2005). However, the use of shaming to regulate gender roles and emasculate men maintains a prevalent status in public discourse.
Another respondent in Prime and Moss-Racusin’s study (2009) reflects on how men who advocate for gender equality are treated among their peers by stating that: “what are some of the words you’ve heard to describe those men? It's always—their manhood is undermined. They're not real men. They're a wimp. They're …whipped. Their heterosexuality is questioned. These are all really powerful policing mechanisms that keep men silent.” (p. 15)

Both communicated as bullying or even framed as jokes or jabs, these reflections on regulatory exchanges among men and boys have serious implications for policing normative gender performativity. Shaming as a mechanism of performative regulation makes examples out of people and punishes them either overtly or covertly for performances of dissent. hooks (2005) argues that shame is one of the primary modes of enforcing and perpetuating patriarchal social relationships (p. 47). Therefore, it is extremely important that educators reflect on the value of using of shame as a pedagogical tool for social justice. Specifically, by recognizing shame as a tool of patriarchal regulation, educators must also ask themselves if shaming has a place in social justice education. I would suggest that a movement away from shame-based pedagogy can also be useful for moving away from regulatory practices of gender roles. Furthermore, shaming and exclusion as a practice in social justice education are problematic because there is a risk of making generalized assumptions about the embodiment of a male identity, which is, in some ways a reconstruction of the same type of over-generalizations found in sex role theory. That said, there is value in making distinctions between patriarchal power structures of masculinity and the lives of men and boys situated in maleness.
Privileged males can experience objectification as the object of analysis in counter-discourse and resistance-based groups. In some ways, excluding privileged people from social justice spaces allows marginalized groups to mobilize without having to navigate the privileged perspectives that contribute to these oppressive conditions in the first place. These exclusionary and oppositional practices are not entirely unwarranted, yet at the same time this assumes—on the basis of representational identity—that men are explicitly agents of oppression incapable of being active participants in change. Even when privileged males do have opportunities to participate in social justice projects, they often find themselves as being the object of analysis rather than an active participant. One respondent in Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) work suggests that “there’s a lot of blame, there’s a lot of shame. Sometimes [white men] don’t really have a voice. Basically every diversity training they've ever experienced has been really negative, and they just go away pissed off and frustrated and blamed and stuff” (p. 15). In this statement, it is clear that the capacity for change is not present in this man’s experience of social justice education, which could be a result of both limited strategies for engagement in learning, or poor communication related to why blame and shame are being used as part of his educational experience giving the appearance that education in this context is perhaps a form of brainwashing.

These perceptions of blame and shame demonstrate how resistance-based discourse can be directed towards dominant or normative subjects as a form of opposition. These accounts suggest that men would be less likely to engage with change projects, especially if experiences leave men or boys “pissed off and frustrated”. This sentiment was found throughout Prime and Moss-Racusin’s work (2009) including the statement from another participant who said “I've got to
keep my head down… I'm not going to say anything, basically, because whatever I say is going to be wrong” (p. 15). Indeed, privileged males and social justice have a precarious relationship and at the same time marginalized people are completely justified in being wary of how privilege can impact their ability to enact social change.

The inclusion of dominant males in social justice discourse should also consider that issues that come with discussing important social issues across privilege and marginalization. It is worth considering how males who embody a dominant social status can have toxic effects on social justice spaces and reinforce problematic relationships of subordination and inequality. Furthermore, one must consider how intersections such as race impact how these spaces operate.

An editorial written by Tauriq Moosa (2017) for The Establishment—a feminist informed social justice online media outlet—provides an account of the feminist discourse that recognizes the issue of privileged voices:

This [conversations across different social locations] isn’t an issue of balance: You can’t counter this by claiming to also want our opinion. The planet’s entire history is one of hearing, witnessing, and struggling against white people’s ideas of race. We’re not on equal platforms; we’re still fighting an uphill battle against the mountain of white supremacy, in the shadow of colonial history. (para. 9)

This raises a couple of questions regarding conversations across difference that are beyond the scope of this thesis, but at the same time are important questions to be asking in spaces of social justice discourse. First, can one consider a white and male perspective that has something
valuable to contribute to projects of social change? Or is the inclusion of privileged male perspectives counter-intuitive to meaningful social justice work? Also, what should be prioritized as the authentic voice of change when we encounter intersections such as gender and race as points of oppression?

From my perspective, there is a need to make a distinction between the cynical and the critical. Consequently, one may ask how blame and shame work as methods of critical analysis and what work these achieve. According to hooks (2005), “[c]ritical analysis is useful when it promotes growth, but it is never enough” (p. 166). When individuals are working across differences there is a need to go beyond cynicism and towards something that is ontologically affirming. This suggests that working meaningfully across difference requires both the ability to employ empathetic knowledge and also a sense of ontological stability. If there is not some sort of space that invites men to discuss the issue of gender-based violence, then how do these men employ the the strategies of anti-violence that resistance-based discourse is asking of them? How do men create a culture of change if they cannot actively participate in change?

To be clear, I am not suggesting that one should abandon or become cynical of critical analysis. Critical thinking is perhaps the cardinal method of unveiling structures of power in our society and thus needs to be present in these pedagogical endeavors (hooks, 2005). I am suggesting, that social justice educators need to develop a reflexive approach to critical analysis by reflecting on the intention behind blame and shaming strategies which could be considered an oppositional approach. If an educator employs shame-based rhetoric while working with privileged males, there is a risk that these males might retreat back towards patriarchal complacency or worse.
From my perspective, it is unlikely shame-based tactics have the capacity to engage privileged males in social justice projects. In fact, excluding men from these conversations is problematic on the basis that men are often the ones most likely to enact gender-based violence in the first place. If social justice education fails to engage men, it is likely that gender-based violence will continue despite the mobilization of social justice communities.

The statements I have included from Prime and Moss-Racusin’s study illustrate an aversion to engagement in gender equity. This aversion to change manifests as a return to “sedimentary language”. Yeo (1992) describes sedimentary language as a retreat towards familiarity (p. 47). In the context of my own professional role as a sexual health educator, sedimentary language is a return to complacency, normative performances of masculinity, and a reinforcement of patriarchal discourse. Statements such as “negative experience”, “pissed off”, “having no voice” all affirm reasons why males might retreat to patriarchal complacency (Prime and Moss-Racusin, 2009). According to Yeo “sedimentary language does not prevent the appearance of new meaning—on the contrary, it makes it possible” (1992, p. 47). Thinking back to the practice of mapping, sedimentary language can tell one a lot of information about how one is oriented and what might need to be communicated or learned to demonstrate the capability to develop an alternative worldview. Understanding how social justice pedagogy redirects privileged men towards complacency can provide educators with a method of identifying where educational practices are working and which are not. This way of thinking about change can help educators reframe opposition as invitations. In practice, this approach could appear as a synthesis of one’s own perceptual experiences, and also an empathetic understanding towards the experiences of
others. This suggests that one speaks best to their own experience, but not the experience of others.

**Complacency**

I have previously described *complacent masculinities* as the inclination to situate one’s self in the world in such a way that one is not actively misogynistic, but instead passively accepting of the rewards of the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 2005). Indeed, one is likely to orient towards complacency if this is perceived as their best option. According to DeNicola (2017), individuals make decisions in relation to the “perceived costs of learning” and the “perceived benefits of knowing” (p. 80). One of the respondents in Prime and Moss-Racusin’s study illustrates why the turn towards patriarchal complacency is a barrier to engaging in social change by stating that “it's so much easier to go along and be a part of it and not critically look at it, because it's not costing you anything on the surface, right? You're a beneficiary of it” (2009, p. 9). This phenomenon, and its illustration here, possibly explains why there is a lack of male engagement in many social justice projects. Although I suggest that one’s motivation to engage with social justice can go above and beyond a cost-benefit analysis, these assertions relate to one’s decision-making process in the context of educational investment.

In Schmitz and Kazyak’s (2016) study on male enrollment in gender studies courses, the experiences of these men are described as “eye-opening” and “tough” (p. 137). Others interviewed spoke to the discomfort and the pain that comes with awareness of gender-violence (Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016). It is not to say that learning experiences need to be explicitly comfortable and I align with the idea that discomfort is integral to self-reflexive and critical
learning (Tanaka, 2016). Historically, the notion of the discomfort of learning has been a concept that has existed throughout Western philosophy, which is particularly visible in the works of Nietzsche (1873/1976) and Plato. Diller (1998) observes Plato’s analogy of the torpedo fish stating that the “analogy conveys not only the force of Socrates’ formidable presence and dialectic, but also the shock of suddenly realizing we do not know what we thought we knew” (p. 1). Indeed, learning destabilizes one’s sense of dwelling. However, an approach to education can also consider separating discomfort from disorientation. Discomfort has the potential to be reorienting. There is the potential for one to reorientate themselves towards new experiences if something perceived as being worth investment is within reach. Meaningful investment can manifest in a multitude of ways ranging from relationship skills and community building to emotional connection and support. Regardless of one’s particular motivation, a benefit can be perceived as long as the form of reorientation is ontologically meaningful to the Self.

One must also consider the costs of stepping outside our gender roles as this may also have negative consequences within peer groups which again relates to the notion of regulatory performances. As illustrated in the previous comments related to “breastfeeding” or “not being real men,” one must consider how to deal with peer conflict, the loss of power and group credibility that comes with challenging masculine stereotypes (Prime and Moss-Racusin, 2009). These comments from participants both serve as a means of regulating performances, but also reinforce why individuals reorient in complacency by way of the cost associated with unconventional masculine performances. Working with men and boys requires some supportive type of community for those who step outside stereotypical and patriarchal roles. A specific example could be talking circles or other community groups that provide connections for those
who challenge masculine stereotypes through the creation of peer groups of men that challenge masculinity. In this case, the cost is a loss of one’s former sense of self, but the benefit is the ability to reorient within a new community of healthy and non-violent masculinities. If there is a possibility to reorient in a different way, then there is also a benefit to investing in change. In fact, supportive spaces for alternative performances of masculinity might possibly challenge complacency because of the benefit of joining these types of groups. Those who challenge the status quo need validation and support in their break from conformity, while also needing a discourse that fosters responsibility and accountability for continuing the path of change.

Dissent from the dominant discourse of gender performances suggests that allies play an important role in social change. A great example of this, is a study conducted with a gender diversity group studied at a high school in Auckland New Zealand. What researchers McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2017), found was a “messy and complex” culture of Queer-Straight Alliances (QSA’s) where space was made at schools for these types of initiatives, yet at the same time QSA’s are also treated as a space of “abnormality” by way of making gender and sexuality visible in a way that is not always in the best interest of LGBTQ students (pp. 486-487). McGlashan and Fitzpatrick ethnographic research demonstrates the importance of ‘straight’ allies in making these school environments a more inclusive space for LGBTQ students, while also navigating the complex relationship between activism and safety. McGlashan and Fitzpatrick report that during a school expo held by the “rainbow group” LGBTQ students “felt torn between having an activist presence in the school, and being too exposed” (2017, p. 493). In particular, and as a promotional effort for the expo, students who identified as LGBTQ did not feel comfortable walking around the school grounds alone wearing sandwich boards to promote
the event (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2017). Navigating this precarious space between inclusion and celebrating difference seemed to be somewhat resolved by the participation of allies who identified themselves as heterosexual. It was these heterosexual students who took on the task of promoting the event by wearing sandwich boards, reporting that they could participate in solidarity with the QSA event, yet at the same time did not have to navigate the precarious space of ‘outing themselves’ as LGBTQ students (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2017). This demonstrates that allies can play an important role in activism without placing the burden of awareness raising on LGBTQ students who already expressed feeling isolated and marginalized on the basis of gender and sexual orientation (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2017). Furthermore, the inclusion of allies providing evidence that there is value in solidarity between groups of various sexual orientations and gender identities by way of using positions of privilege as a method of encouraging social change in a way that is comfortable for LGBTQ community members.

**Ignorance**

Participation in social change is not only an issue of solidarity, change is also prevented by a lack of knowledge on issues of social injustice. Attempting to define ignorance is challenging considering the complex parameters of what constitutes knowing and not knowing. A definitive account of what can be included in the status of ignorance is often unclear. As a point of departure, ignorance can be described as the status of not knowing, having some important implications for both learning and knowledge (DeNicola, 2017). However, ignorance reaches beyond a simplistic status of not knowing. Ignorance includes passive, active, and willing formulations which is also related to either the denial or distance from information such as:
policies; practices; ideologies; and media that contradict one’s personal worldview (DeNicola, 2017). Ignorance manifests in various distinct forms such as the passive status of authentically not knowing, or as an active form of ignorance by avoiding information willfully or intentionally. According to DeNicola (2017) willful ignorance is a choice, because “[w]hatever our beliefs, we may enjoy a cozy informational cocoon in which we hear only the news opinions, music, and voices we prefer. Ideas that might challenge our views never reach us” (p.9). Willful ignorance is the tendency to remain within the orientations that are most familiar. Therefore, disrupting ignorance is a process that requires going beyond access to information and towards the embodiment of self-knowledge.

A critical analysis of knowledge offered by both feminists and other critical theoretical work has the potential to reveal new pathways of knowing, offering alternative perspectives on history, truth, and organizations of power. However, engaging with feminist perspectives and other critical theories can be an unfamiliar experience from positions of maleness, straightness, and whiteness. Alternative embodiments of knowledge may very likely not be within reach, even if information that disrupts one’s beliefs is available. DeNicola (2017) addresses this concern by asking if it is “reasonable to pursue a goal that one does not possess and cannot envision?” (p. 37). Being situated in the knowledge of change is an important consideration for being active in social change. First, one needs an awareness that change is a possibility, followed by exploring what change might look like, and what it means to participate in change. Returning to Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009), one respondent discloses that “I think a lot of them [men] just don't have the experiences that tell them to be aware of…the possibilities that come with diversity” (p. 14). This perspective suggests that males require personally meaningful exposure to situations and
experiences that demonstrate the reality of diverse experiences and perspectives, especially in the context of social inequality. At first, these new possibilities may be disorienting, but can potentially lead shifts in understanding, knowledge, and behaviour. If opportunities for change are not in view, the ability to participate in change may perhaps remain unknown.

Men in positions of dominance or privilege do not necessarily experience marginalization. To be clear, this discomfort that many of these men are reporting is not oppression. Men have the autonomy to return to their privileged and complacent status of being. Those who experience oppression, are blocked by “forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional”, which are systemic and ongoing and described by Frye through the analogy of being trapped in a birdcage (1983, p. 6). A single wire would not keep the bird contained, it is the addition of multiple wires used to construct the cage that keep the bird inside a cage. In the context of oppression, it is not one instance of oppression that constitutes the status of oppressed, but a structure similar to that of a cage that contains one in the status of oppression. Therefore, one must be mindful to not mischaracterize one’s bad experience with oppression. There is a difference between exclusion and experiencing oppression. Without experiencing social inequality firsthand, privileged males are likely not thinking critically about the habits and performances that contribute to social oppression. They are not attuned to how power is intertwined with personal experiences because our dominant ideological structure benefits rather than oppresses them. Demonstrating this reality, and again returning to Prime & Moss-Racusin is a research participant’s statement that explicitly states how experience is a barrier to critical thinking and a knowledge of oppression (2009):
“When you're from the dominant group you also don't have that history of struggle and analysis that comes from the nondominant group’s perspective. Almost universally, whether it's around race, whether it's around gender, sexual orientation, ability… I find that a lot of men just don't have the tools to really look at that big picture and make some of those connections. Very few men have that history or that analysis of those bigger pictures, the dynamics, unless they've been part of an oppressed group in one of those senses. It's not a natural, or it's not something taught. It's not something that's shared with us by our fathers.” (p. 16)

I consider two pieces of this statement valuable for understanding hermeneutical situations of normativity and privilege. First, men might not have a personal history that allows them to explicitly understand oppression. In this case, oppression is out of view or distant from their experience and knowledge. Second, there needs to be opportunities for learning about systems of oppression. However, it is also worth identifying a distinction between exposure to information and learning. The status of learning must also go beyond access to information, learning also requires both utility and application. DeNicola (2017) asserts that “accessing is not learning” (p. 77), he goes on to say that “access to information is only as valuable as the intelligence that selects and applies it” (p. 77). Therefore, it is imperative to move from a point of access to information about oppression towards a space of investment and engagement, or the “genuine assimilation of information into knowledge” (DeNicola, 2017, p.77). Assimilating information into knowledge requires orienting in such a way that information becomes part of one’s pathway, or integrated into the assemblage of one’s perceptual experiences.
Combining opposition, complacency, and ignorance—as described by the accounts of men engaged in various forms of social justice activities or education—provides a map of where men are distant from the experience of oppression, and where men can demonstrate the ability to embody an epistemological shift. What results is the appearance of alternative pathways, locating qualities of assemblages of where social justice can entangle with masculinities and where the movement towards knowledge can rupture or disconnect. Mapping out these multiplicities in perspectives and experience directs change towards a pedagogy that works with men to understand how social inequality is configured, yet in a way that starts from where they understand the world. Furthermore, a pedagogy of challenging hegemonic masculinity needs to arrive at a place of ontological significance.

**A Deleuzian Map of Perceptual Masculinities**

Mapping has been a consistent theme throughout this thesis. I have endorsed the use of assemblages, hermeneutics, social histories, and personal histories as a conceptual plane through which stereotypical masculinities are understood, explored, and challenged. Mapping provides one with a sense of the perceptual situation that individuals might find themselves in. It helps educators understand how the learners may perceive their interactions with information, learning, and knowing. Mapping here is not meant to be confused with explicitly identifying points on a map. Instead, I understand mapping through a Deleuzian lens which is grounded in process-oriented methodology and using the principles of rhizome theory (see p.72). These Deleuzian principles of rhizomes are synthesized with Ahmed’s theory of phenomenological theory or orientation. What emerges through the synthesis of these two theories is imagery that represents connections, directions, orientations, and experiences. Mapping describes both where one is
coming from and where one may possibly end up. It is a way of revealing possibilities for theoretical frameworks, rather than being an objective model of how learning explicitly takes place.

Within my pedagogy of disrupting masculinities, mapping achieves a synthesis of personal experiences within a particular position of our social conditions. My intention is to construct a method of locating what forms of knowledge are familiar or distant. Importantly, my map is not a rigid conceptual model. Instead, my map demonstrates methodological process. As I have discussed previously, observing the nuances of difference—even within seemingly homogeneous groups—reveals that the relationship between knowledge and experience is complicated and intricate given the diversity of lived experience. What I have mapped out in my research is both particular, yet also precarious. These two qualifiers are important because learning must also be situated in the life of a learner. My mapping strategy is an attempt to locate the possibilities for a future understanding of what may be useful in developing pedagogical frameworks and curricula. Specifically, this strategy is particular to the context of working with males in positions of privilege, utilizing a social justice framework, and dismantling toxic behaviours and attitudes of masculinity that are often hidden from one’s view. Here, I mean to suggest that there are behaviours these men consciously conceal from others, and those that they themselves are unaware of—subconscious and/or outside the bearer’s own perception. These are the boundaries through which this work is understood from my perspective, yet in itself it is precarious on the basis that privilege and masculinities are also quite diverse, being dynamic rather than static. Offering concrete solutions may misrepresent the particularities and precariousness of both lived experiences and self-knowledge. Nevertheless, the questions that I have posited throughout this
thesis are worth considering as representational boundaries for the limitations to information
access and also the potential for knowledge acquisition when working with males on the topic of
gender-based violence.

Boundaries help educators and learners to identify how to connect people with change. DeNicola
(2017) identifies what boundaries do by stating that:

A boundary both distinguishes two domains and simultaneously conjoins them in their adjacency. It is its boundary that identifies a place and defines its shape. The boundary of something also marks the beginning of something else, some other place, the edge of what-is-not-the-defined-place. It may serve as a barrier protecting the integrity of what it defines; but it may also be a threshold, a limen, channeling and filtering exits and entrances from one place to another. Such boundary crossings, depends on context, may be described as passages, transformations, journeys, filtrations, or violations. The drawing of a boundary creates a border...”. (p. 66, emphasis in original)

Conceptualizing borders is work that can be accomplished through the use of post-structural
analysis. Assemblage, as a method, measures limitations by offering alternative perspectives on
concepts such as power, discourse and history, and by challenging the objectivity of knowledge.
Critiques of post-structuralist perspectives fail to recognize the value in what is constructed
through the use of mapping boundaries such as language, knowledge, and separating what is
assumed as an objective reality and what is socially constructed (Middleton, 1992). Indeed, there is
an opportunity to engage with the borders of 'the real', yet at the same time entertain an exploration
of the possibilities that come with disrupting assumptions. An integrated approach—including the hermeneutical status of epistemology with the aforementioned structural conditions—brings both the known and the unknown into view. Boundaries understood in this way are not markers of truth; they are markers of the limitations of truth. Boundaries are metrics of what can be known and what is possible within the conditions of situated knowledge. Finally, boundaries direct educators to identify the epistemological limitations of learners, such as expressions of ignorance and barriers to the will to change.

Given the prevalence of the idea of mapping and orientation in this thesis, I felt inclined to attempt my own visual representation of how knowledge, masculinity, experience, and social conditions intersect. This is not meant to be quantifiable, nor empirical, yet it provides a means of creating an assemblage of the masculine situation, bringing together the personal and the social. This visual representation of masculine subjectivities and orientation is found on the next page followed by an explanation of what informs this assemblage of masculine subjectivities.
My Deleuzian-informed map locates knowledge and experience through the metrics of ignorance, opposition, and complacency. It identifies both the connections and disconnections that occur in relation to ontologies of hegemony, humanization, social justice and possibility. As discussed in previous chapters, the framework for my map’s design borrows from the methodology of assemblages as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, as well as from Ahmed’s concept of orientations. The emerging lines represent possible paths considering both spatial and temporal implications. Locations marked with ‘X’s’ are representative of disconnections or lines...
of rupture (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2016). From any points and any lines other possibilities may emerge. In the case of ruptures, arrows direct individuals back to paths of familiarity in some cases, or towards new orientations in others. These ruptures could be representative of—but not limited to—instances of ignorance, complacency, and opposition. From a phenomenological perspective, these ruptures are the moments of disorientation. The way in which these ruptures are positioned could be considered a glimpse of what an assemblage may look like, while at the same time, acknowledging that assemblages are fluid, organic, morphing, and entangled with other assemblages.

Hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity are central features in the figure and are the salient representations of masculinity from where the conditions of patriarchy are directed towards both males and also embodiments of marginalized positions. This pathway is not meant to be represented as hierarchal or centralized, but instead these signifiers are placed in fields intersecting with paths that may also move and shift. Ruptures may also not impact all masculinities in the same way. The ‘X’ located on the hegemonic masculinity pathway, for instance, is a point of disconnection for some and not others on the basis of intersections such as sexual orientation, social-economic status, racialization and other barriers to the embodiment of hegemonic masculine, leading to a number possible of ontological positionalities for identity. These intersections are not explicitly located or named in the figure, but one could consider these “X’s” as possible points of lived experience where marginalization could occur.

Ignorance also intersects through my exploration of epistemology and experience. Particularly in this chapter, it is hermeneutically represented that the less often experiences of boys and men
intersect with oppression the less likely it is that they will have an understanding of power and their own performances that maintain certain structures of power. Ideally, I can imagine a world where any information shared that demonstrates the truth-power relationship would be capable of shifting perspectives towards a more just society. However, it appears that currently our society is in a stubborn time of struggling with confirmation bias, competing truths, and ‘fake news’. Information alone is not always enough to enact change; it may be necessary, but it is apparently insufficient.

Complacency may also direct men and boys towards certain areas of the assemblage. Being comfortably located in the position of privilege makes alternative ways of being more difficult to invest in. This is especially true when one asks themselves, should I give up comfort for discomfort, or orientation for disorientation? This suggests that it is worth exploring what alternative pedagogies and discourses have to offer when men and boys engage in gender-violence prevention. Again, this is a question of the potential for and commitment to investment. Perhaps, one pragmatic consideration of these epistemological positions is developing methods to challenge masculinity in a way that makes the embodiment of change ontologically self-affirming, fulfilling, and reachable, yet also capable of creating a capacity for accountability and empathy for those who experience oppression.

Opposition is the final metric that will be used to understand barriers to learning. As a signifier of Othering and objectifying, negation has been previously characterized and critiqued in this work in relation to the perceived issue of presumed value assessments that come with differentiation. If even possible, attempts at moving away from opposition offer alternative
epistemological understandings of differentiation. Throughout this thesis, negation and
opposition have been spoken about in multiple ways. I have discussed Othering through Hegel’s
dialectical model, which represents the conflict that results in differentiation. Negation and
opposition have also been previously discussed as objectifying masculinities as the
representational status of privilege and power. That is, rather than recognizing the complexities
of the embodiment of masculinities the male position is dehumanized as a product of power
analysis. These assessments are incomplete and often lead to divisiveness. As discussed in
chapter two, intersectionality and hierarchies of identity—even as counter-discourse—construct
others formulations of hierarchies that maintain dialectical relationships and contribute to the
difficulty of working across differences. In this case, conflict arises in the context of agency and
autonomy, or what Yuval-Davis describes as the “oppression olympics” (2012, p. 52; see chapter
two p. 65).

Masculinity also manifests as an object of power. Let’s consider that masculinity is often the
object of feminist critique, which exists as a disembodiment of the lived position of maleness. In
many settings, this is a useful tactic for uncovering systems of oppression. However, an issue
emerges when speculating what alternatives to traditional masculinities look like beyond
opposition and objectification. This relates to investment in social justice discourse and
pedagogy in a couple of ways. First, is the messy issue of whose voice should be the voice of
social justice. I subscribe to the idea that social justice projects should be led as often as possible
by diverse types of people, especially those who tend to experience marginalization in their own
lived experiences. Perhaps, it would seem illogical to have a white male at the helm of
Indigenous resistance projects or to have a cis-gendered male facilitate discussions for gender-
diverse and transgender community groups (Anderson & Innes, 2015). Having those from dominant positions take on leadership roles has been shown to be extremely paternalistic and maintain oppressive relationships. In fact, paternalistic behaviour by mainstream society has reinforced a continuation of colonial conditions and the resulting intergenerational trauma of Indigenous peoples (Anderson & Innes, 2015). Nevertheless, a close examination of identity reveals difficult situations such as determining whose voices should be heard when experiences such as being LGBTQ or Indigenous intersect with masculinities. As represented in the diagram and the narratives of men provided in this chapter, the issue of voice can also be a point of disconnection for dominant male participation in emancipatory projects. This is another rupture when orientating towards change, and is an issue of how to navigate anti-oppressive participation.

As each “X” is marked in the emerging pathways I have chosen to explore, it is difficult to find places of connection that construct something that is self-affirming, socially just, and allows for humanization within the diversity of maleness. Within the context of my professional role as an educator, masculinities reaching towards an alternative future are situated in a negative space. Here, there is a lack of something to move towards, a lack of an alternative role model that is socially valuable, reachable, and fulfilling. This is especially difficult when acknowledging that masculinity intersects with oppressive forces such as capitalism, racism, and colonization. As argued by Beauvoir (1949/2011), the situation of gender is informed by economics, militarism, and politics and collectively these ideologies and institutions are meant to appeal to the situation of patriarchy rather than those marginalized on the basis of gender. This acknowledges that education aimed at dismantling patriarchy needs to consider that patriarchy exists throughout
these various points of systemic conditions and that they reinforce one another. Men and boys who want to embrace change may also be oppression through homophobia, colonization and other oppressive factors that need to be addressed in the process of change.

One other aspect that I would like to consider is the assertion that I have approached this project using a post-structuralist framework for a particular reason. This is related to the importance of approaching issues of gender-based violence in a non-linear way. What I am suggesting is that patriarchy often operates both covertly and comprehensively (Butler, 1993). Aspects of patriarchy are found in our families, media, institutions and so on. This is not something that exists at the top of a pyramid shaped model, but instead is embedded in our daily interactions with social systems and in intersubjective relationships. Although assemblage-based thinking is likely to result in further ambiguity and complexity it is—from my perspective—more accurately attuned to the diverse and competing ontological realities in our shared world than a linear model of pedagogical conceptualization. This assertion is premised on the concept of assemblage as discussed in Chapter One. First, the concept of masculinity is decentered, meaning patriarchal influences are not centralized, but instead, can be found both overtly and covertly in many aspects of our lives. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2016). Second, patriarchy exists in multiplicities. This notion of multiplicities observes that patriarchy does not operate in isolation, but is constituted in other institutions, social practices, and personal thoughts. It is embedded throughout the social field, reinforcing the maintenance of patriarchal systems. Therefore, when one attempts to understand how hegemonic masculinity is maintained, one is likely to be led down a non-linear path of learning and exploration towards change. The mechanisms of reinforcing conventional gender performances are continuously being negotiated, re-negotiated,
challenged, and legitimized in a multitude of ways in the social field. This is not to suggest that emancipatory work cannot be done through non-linear pedagogical methods. Instead, it suggests that how people are situated, or where one finds their understanding of themselves and the world, matters in the context of one’s relationship to knowledge.

What is understood as factors that influence knowledge can also be represented in the form of an assemblage. Expanding on the first diagram, we can add the mechanisms of regulation that lead males towards certain ways of knowing and orientation. As a result, the previous diagram may change into something that looks like this:

*Figure 3. Social Forces & Masculinities. A visual representation of structures of power.*
This second visual conceptualization of social forces as an assemblage illustrates that regulatory forces that influence masculinities are not necessarily centralized, but instead they are integrated in one’s experiences, knowledge, and perceptions. Of course this is a limited representation of the types of social forces that could be included. I suggest that forces also include forces ranging from institutions, political affiliations, income level, and colonization among many others. On the one hand, these multiple and intersecting forces make patriarchy difficult to challenge directly, yet on the other hand it means emancipatory efforts can be taken up on a multitude of ways. With this in mind, resistance work can be taken up in relationships like families, in classrooms, or by evaluating the media sources one consumes. There is not merely one way to address the issues that result from patriarchy. Instead, one is presented with myriad opportunities to engage with both resistance and change.

Re-thinking masculinities is cardinal to how emerging possibilities for pedagogy and curriculums are constructed in the context of gender justice education. My thesis question, *how should educators understand masculinity in the context of social justice education*, is taken up as a project of what educators have done so far and what the future might look like. There are two things that I would like to be clear about when attempting to readdress this question at this point in my exploration of this topic. First, what I have spoken about and what I aim to achieve is situated in work that is directly aimed at working with men and boys. I do not wish to speak for or advocate for the idea that this approach will always be effective in the broader application for social justice. Specifically, marginalized groups—either self-defined or socially determined—may find other methods for emancipatory work that are not only more effective, but also align with their experiences, goals, and community values. However, working specifically with male-
identified groups, I cannot help but ask, what does the future of masculine identities look like if it is merely an object of power analysis? It seems that humanizing education can include power analysis, yet requires a movement beyond critique in order to create change-based communities.

I am interested in having men and boys commit to work towards change, rather than stopping short at exposure to information which is necessary but insufficient. My suggestion is that sustainable change takes a critical approach to the past, the present, and the future. I do not think it is just the responsibility of marginalized activist groups to do the work of change, precisely because moving away from the dialectical model requires one to “increase the scope of their perception” (Freire, 1970/1992, p. 70). Furthermore, placing the responsibility of change on marginalized communities may increase the burden of marginalization. Instead, I suggest that we are at a point in our history where we can ask individuals to look both inwardly and outwardly simultaneously—an empathetic phenomenology, if you will. Both educators and learners should be reflecting on how they model masculinity, how they understand intimate relationships, and how they can create space for others. Phenomenologically, this requires something men can move towards learning that is experience-based; that is, something that they can embody, invest in, and that can foster ontological affirmation in a way that does not negate and dominate others. In her work on masculinities, bell hooks observes that we ask men to “change without creating a culture of change to affirm and assist them” (2005, p. 185). This is precisely the goal that I am attempting to work towards. If one of the goals of challenging gender-based violence is reimagining masculinities then educators need to begin the work of understanding what this culture of change may look like. It requires educators to build a novel way of doing masculinities that men and boys can work towards. Bringing together assistance and affirmation means a
process of reorientation that is hermeneutically familiar with the potential to encourage self-reflexive learning, a form of learning that is at the same time both self-affirming and disruptive of ignorance as an acceptable means of navigating the world.

Educational Possibilities for Engaging Men and Boys in Social Justice Education

My exploration of potential pedagogical possibilities for social justice education with men and boy is not definitive, but rather, is the point of departure for asking the questions masculinities theory has not been asking in the context of working with males in an educational context. In my diagram found on page 161, the signifier “?” identifies the movement towards possible pedagogical considerations for social justice education aimed at men and boys. Returning to Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009), I reflect on the qualitative data that suggests what draws men towards investing in social justice work in a way that is self-fulfilling. I have identified possibilities that must be unpacked further, but are worth considering in the formulations of positive alternatives of masculine identities. This includes investment, diversity, expression, and role modelling as points of access that could be useful for not only explicitly educational learning, but also in the context of broader concepts of gender socialization and performance.

A useful step in re-evaluating maleness is not only a movement towards the future, but also examining what is lost, or thought to be lost in the past. In Prime & Moss-Racusin (2009), one respondent reports that “there's a shrinking number of managers, and if I really get on board with this [gender equity policies], it's threatening to my job, my future” (p. 15). First, this example is an expression of ignorance, suggesting that gender equity policies that permit increase female participation in the labour market are somehow based on a zero-sum set of circumstances where
for each female hired or promoted one male must be unemployed or demoted. However, these policies make space for others rather than taking space away from men. hooks observes that a shift in masculinity may require the difficulties that come with a loss of privileged status (2005). These expressions of grief may manifest as a perceived—but inaccurate—loss of power, a connection to one’s former sense of self, and reflecting on the emotional experiences that occur in moments of disorientation and discomfort. Change can be extremely difficult and uncomfortable. There needs to be space for men to speak about this shift as a disorientating experience while actually providing them with information about how these types of policies actually work in practice.

hooks suggest that in order to enact change we must be able to acknowledge that men are also victims of patriarchal conditions (2005). By working supportively with both groups and individuals by validating and empathizing with experiences of fearing change, there is an opportunity to reorient and perhaps provide a point of connection that could result in a will to change. Perhaps, this could also be a point of inter-group commonality, reciprocity, and community building. Fostering vulnerability as an alternative to anger or ignorance brings alternative performances within reach. This can lead to not only connections across difference, but also an ontological understanding that difference can be humanized in commonality insofar as understanding that patriarchy is a toxic situation for all people in some form or another.

Paradoxically a loss of self is found both in patriarchy and in challenging patriarchy. One of Prime and Moss-Racusin’s respondents reports that in challenging their assumptions of masculine identities “I lost myself—who I really am—because I think I was caught in this myth
of being male or acting male” (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009, p. 9). This is similar to what hooks (2005) describes as an “empty longing” (p. 49), suggesting that the need for self-affirmation and connection with others needs to be synthesized in projects of change. Without addressing change as a holistic effort of self-evolution there is a risk of further investment in the “hypermasculine patriarchal ideal” (hooks, 2005, p. 49). There is likely to be frustration and moments of flight in the process of change and these issues cannot be ignored. Working with men and boys in this fashion is about supporting the uncertainty that comes with change by acknowledging that if support to change is not offered, men may retreat to regressive or problematic alternatives.

The link between investment and connection can also relate to one’s familial relationships and our investment in their life circumstances. This is where education extends beyond classrooms and into the most important relationships in one’s life that matters most. This is not only a connection to empathic practices and performances, but also demonstrates what experiences and values might encourage individuals to invest in change. “In some instances it's a very personal investment in improving the lives of our daughters, making the world a freer and safer place for ourselves as men, for women we care about” (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009, p. 21). Here, change is a personal investment in one’s own family. It is not an abstract conceptualization of power and political structures, but instead a concrete method of making the political appear as personal.

The importance of performativity is also an important feature of challenging patriarchy through the use of understanding problematic examples of role models, and role modelling what change looks like. Here, one can diversify what constitutes a role model for masculinities. There is no
shortage of extremely problematic masculine role models found in our communities, popular culture, and politics. Indeed, one can also consider the advantage of role models who are women, or people who come from marginalized experiences. These role models bring with them the experiences and attitudes of what change might look like. One respondent to Prime & Moss-Racusin’s study (2009) reflects on how his relationships with women have been an important source of learning about healthy relationships across gender, stating that:

“I have role models of very strong women.... I’ve been lucky in my life in terms of the women who have taught me how to treat women.... The women that I’ve been exposed to are really quite extraordinary people in terms of how they perform.” (p. 8)

In reflection of this response, a point of departure for understanding what alternatives of male performance might look like requires the engagement of other genders as allies for men constructing alternatives. hooks (2005) describes this as a need for a shift in pop culture. She states that “enlightened men must claim it [mass media] as the space of their public voice and create a progressive culture that will teach men how to connect with others, how to communicate, how to love” (hooks, 2005, p. 134). This supports the idea that there needs to be a collective shift, a non-dialectical agreement, and as termed by Freire, a “liberation” from oppressive forces in future manifestations of gender identity within the shared social field (1992). Through role modelling, personal expression, empathy, performance, and critical learning, healthy and non-violent reorientation could potentially be achieved. The value of diversity is also an aspect of role modelling towards empathy. As one respondent reports “I continue to learn from and benefit from their insights on diversity and inclusion. Diversity has
made my professional life richer and more interesting” (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009, p. 13). From my perspective, acknowledging diversity as a strength is a helpful and important way of addressing opposition and humanizing difference.

Working collectively across differences is an important aspect of healthier expressions of masculinities. Both Prime and Moss-Racusin’s work, and narratives included in Anderson and Innis’s *Indigenous Masculinities*, point to men who look towards women as role models for an alternative to toxic and hegemonic expressions of masculinity. It is not necessarily the task of women or individuals in other positions of marginalization to educate men, but when they speak about these issues we can listen and take these narratives back to our male communities. Again, asking marginalized individuals to educate men may only increase the burden of marginalization. Agents of change must also be aware that role modeling might include both working across gender and across culture. Importantly, one should be wary of contributing to further oppression and both the emotional labour and trauma that result when asking marginalized people to assist in re-thinking what constitutes a positive masculine role-model. However, there is great value in learning about how a discourse of masculinities can shift through those who are most likely to be oppressed in patriarchal conditions, for example, by listening to those who are also racialized and colonized within our social systems. Change in the context of oppressive assemblages means both the methods of change and the knowledge used to enact change will likely be diverse. Be that as it may, the broader results of enacting change through a model of diversity have the potential of being humanizing both within and across groups.
Many of the examples of masculinities that emerged in my inquiry came to be included through my own assemblages of emerging knowledge as the project continued to unfold. In my day to day encounters, I engaged with topics that were presented through various lenses of media. I read the types of literature that people are ‘supposed to read’ when they talk about gender philosophy. I listened to podcasts, I talked with friends and colleagues, and I facilitated workshops with high school students about gender-based violence. Consequently, some exploration conformed with my epistemological bubble and hopefully some of my research was shaped by perspectives that did not. As I searched endlessly to find that one academic article with all the answers I was looking for, it seemed that my questions directed me towards a way of researching masculinities that was yet to be explored. There was no blueprint for the ideas I was trying to navigate. Understanding how to take up education on the topic of gender-based violence became less about a specific theory and more about the lives of men and the experiences of maleness.

These various points of access to information on masculinities informed how I have come to understand education in the context of this thesis project. As my conceptual ideas started to formulate around education, I assumed that the path taken would be one of curriculum development, and evaluating the current status of particular social justice programming, support groups, and other similar initiatives. What I thought defined pedagogy changed drastically throughout this research, especially in the context of gender. The life we know and the way we are situated in the world is full of education and experiences that are often overlooked as essential features of what constitutes epistemology. Gender education is found in the discourse related to the use of certain pronouns, the story of Adam and Eve, segregated sports teams, exclusionary videogame culture, gender-specific washrooms, feminist blogs, and casual conversations with friends. Gender education is everywhere in the lives of all people, yet
education is often reduced to schooling and so it is seen as something that happens only in classrooms. This has a sort of paradoxical effect. First, there are endless ways to take up social justice education ranging from formal lectures, to sharing and discuss memes on an online thread, to a casual conversation with our children.

There are so many meaningfully diverse ways to take up this work that can have a transformative impact on the harmful aspects of hegemonic masculinity and the conditions of patriarchy. On the other hand, normative and stereotypical gender performativity and discourse are found in practically every location that has the potential to be an educational space. If one is not looking for opportunities for change, what could be considered an educational space might remain as oppressive space. There is an overwhelming amount of work that needs to be done, from addressing the more overt forms of sexism, homophobia, and transphobia to addressing the more subversive and complex institutional and linguistic structures of oppression. Given this complexity, educational emancipation will need to manifest in diverse forms. However, within these diverse methods of educational practice, what seems to be necessary is the requirement for humanizing solutions of ontological significance.

In order to materialize emancipatory change, educators must acknowledge the reality of a non-totalizing, precarious, and incomplete process. Both normative and counter discourses are always shifting, rupturing, and evolving. According to Gallagher (1992):

“Emancipation will not be accomplished in a total escape from the process of tradition. It will involve an incomplete transformation or partial transcendence within language. Only
through language is it possible to transcend a tradition, which means that one must work within a tradition to transform it, or to produce a new one.” (p. 77).

Working within tradition does not necessarily suggest that tradition will be present throughout change-based work, yet perhaps it is a starting point of change for those who are most resistant and ignorant to oppressive conditions. There will be both failures and successes along the way and solutions will likely come with their own set of new issues. This is a continually incomplete process and change “cannot be based on an absolute or external reflection, but must operate within the hermeneutical bounds of interpretive understanding” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 78). Post-structuralist mapping is, therefore, a glimpse of the boundaries that are constructed through language and knowledge, yet at the same time does not posit absolutes such as truths, facts, and universality where these exist as misconceptions and dangerous assumptions. The post-structural perspective makes space for the details that are often overlooked in one’s conceptual analysis of identity. From this perspective, enacting change is not necessarily the grandiose notion of achieving a utopian society as much as it is a continuous project of evaluating one’s day-to-day life.

To establish what actually constitutes humanization requires a critical analysis of what can be considered liberation from oppression. Throughout this thesis, I have mentioned several times the need to be attuned to the ideas of space and voice from various perspectives and life experiences. In particular, one needs to be aware of where the work of addressing patriarchy is most appropriate based on how one is both personally situated and socially represented. Effective learning synthesizes these two conditions of the Self. Progress towards agency in the context of
voice and space is not about speaking where and when you desire to do so. Instead, contributing to the conversation of gender-based violence requires knowing when to speak and when to listen (Strega, 2015; Tanaka, 2016).

The issue of space suggests that individuals need to understand when to talk and when to listen. It would be fair to say that our society has heard its fair share of male voices, which have made androcentric thinking the foundation of many political and social institutions. In order to better understand why both institutions and personal relationships lead to marginalization, one must consider the importance of listening to the experiences of those who are oppressed under these conditions. Therefore, a vital part of participating in emancipatory change requires learning from diverse types of people outside of the status of the dominant male position. What may be found in both act and spaces of learning, is the opportunity for men and boys to gain an understanding of how males can move forward in an inclusive and anti-oppressive way.

This process of voice can be done in various stages. First, men need to listen in order to build the understanding required to disrupt their orientation in relation to oppressive practices. It is in these spaces of listening where learning begins. When one learns they also need to consider that it is not the responsibility of marginalized people to teach us how to change (Tanaka, 2016). Instead, we can wait for invitations to witness the stories and experiences of marginalized people, including how the relations of power intersect with their experiences of inequality. Talking begins for men and boys after witnessing the narratives of the Other, and then taking these stories back to their male or masculine communities. This practice assists in the prevention
of burdening marginalized people with the task of teaching and change—which in itself would be another form of oppression.

Therefore, men should be tasked with taking the learning back to communities of men and finding ways to address issues of gender violence and inequality within their own gender community. It is about disrupting patriarchy through alternative performances of maleness as a male community. It is about addressing locker room talk, being more than a bystander, connecting emotionally and expressing empathy with other men. It is not the responsibility of men to change other communities, but it is their responsibility to change themselves. Our best work can be done in our own communities with open minds and open hearts. hooks (2005) states that “men will find it freeing to acknowledge that the stress of guarding and protecting a false self is harmful to male emotional well-being; it erodes self esteem” (p. 157). From this perspective, men need to stop reinforcing the practices that are harmful to themselves and others by constructing new performances of maleness, which often seems to be the missing piece in social justice education. Heasley and Crane (2012) observe that, “there is no other to reflect upon that is valued or desired above or even alongside that of the hegemonic masculine” (p. 101). If this does not exist explicitly at this point in time, then there is value in starting to explore what this may look like. This is the work that men and boys need to be doing as participants in emancipatory activities.

One of the most complex barriers to humanization that this work observes is the issue of differentiation through the practice of opposition. Perhaps, there is no facticity within our ontological situation available within socially constructed systems, language, and knowledge that
would allow humans to transcend the practice of differentiation, and likely it would not be an advantage to do so. Othering in itself might be considered part of ‘the real’ beyond what is socially constructed and as a practice of ‘knowing’ the world is ontologically significant. Nevertheless, the practice of oppositional differentiation is problematic insofar as it encourages hierarchal organization as a seemingly intrinsic aspect of differentiation. Othering is not necessarily problematic. Othering may also come with productive implications by way of taking the time to understand the other as a different ontological state and a different phenomenological status (Yeo, 1992). Othering unveils inequalities in the pursuit of social justice. Othering is not a negative practice, but instead, it is the discourse of Othering that needs to be addressed.

In closing this exploration of masculinities, there is much that remains uncertain. At this point, I feel as though I have more questions and fewer answers. What does seem clear is that the only way to engage in learning about gender is through one’s own positionality. This includes both one’s own personal experiences and one’s encounter with knowledge. Information and knowledge need to be accounted for separately, as the latter is of particular ontological significance to the individual. What it means to embody maleness changes from person to person and across temporal and spatial particularities. Regardless of one’s own location, there is an ontological need to exist, to matter, to be acknowledged as a human, and to be invited into a culture of change.
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