

**“I’m here for it... but I’m not ‘Feminist Ken’”:
Unpacking Young Men’s Perspectives on Feminism**

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 2020

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Sociology

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University of Victoria

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Current understandings of feminism emphasize that men's inclusion in the feminist movement is of utmost importance to achieve gender equality and dismantle hegemonic power structures. Despite this, there is a shortage of contemporary research exploring the manner through which men understand feminism, and how that understanding may influence their willingness to engage with feminism. Using semi-structured interviews with thirteen men enrolled at the University of Victoria, this research explores some of the ways that young men are understanding and engaging with feminism. The research questions guiding this project are: 1. How do young men understand and engage with feminism? What factors influence this relationship? 2. How do social norms of masculinity influence men's relationship with feminism?

Findings indicate that participants' understandings of feminism are complex and sometimes contradictory. All participants indicated that they supported gender equality broadly, yet also expressed resistance to various elements of feminism. Specifically, the data indicates that participants commonly understand feminism positively when framed in terms of liberal feminism, and express resistance to forms of feminism that challenge traditional patriarchal structures. The data also suggests that young men's understanding of feminism is intertwined with their understanding of masculinity and their role as men in society, as participants expressed concern over backlash from other men and discussed archetypes of demographics of men most likely to engage in feminism. Overall, this study suggests that young men's understanding of feminism transcends binary acceptance or rejection, and is often intertwined with their understanding of masculinity and performance of their gender. Furthermore, the findings provide insight into the ways that young men are currently grappling with shifting hegemonic norms of masculinity, and the potential consequences that may have on their understanding of their role in social change and gender equality.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my family for all their love and encouragement throughout this degree. Particularly I would like to thank my parents; you have taught me that one of the most profound ways to love others is to be engaged in social justice. I hope I have made you proud.

To my beautiful community, words will never adequately capture the depth of my gratitude for the laughter, inspiration, and joy you all bring to my life. Throughout the chaos of this degree, I was surrounded by the most supportive group of humans, and my world is forever better because you are all in it.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Steve Garlick and Dr. Katelin Albert for their unending support and willingness to answer an absurd amount of emails. This thesis would never have made it out of my mind palace without your patience and encouragement, thank you for everything.

Introduction

Feminism, a concept that broadly refers to the movement (and associated theories) to address gender inequality (Herbert 2007), has become newly popular in Western social discourse over the past few years. The release of the film *Barbie* in 2024, a film that explores gender relations within the patriarchy through the fictional story of Barbie and Ken dolls. The film was an enormous success, grossing over \$1 billion at the global box office in the first month of its release (ABC News 2023). Many celebrated the film for encouraging a global conversation about the normative beliefs underpinning masculinity and femininity, underscoring the message that gender equality will only be achieved through collaborative efforts across society (Zheng 2024). Additionally, the film focused on Ken as an example of men unpacking their relationship with toxic masculinity, closing with the reflection that through decoupling from patriarchal social norms, both the Barbie's and the Ken's were liberated from oppressive social norms.

While the film was well received around the globe, the production also received enormous backlash from conservatives and progressives alike, such as the popular Colombian singer-songwriter Shakira, who posted a video detailing her disdain for the movie as encouraging women to dominate men (The Guardian 2024). Other negative reviews included more conservative social media personalities like Candace Owens and Ben Shapiro tweeting about the film encouraging toxic femininity, a term used to discredit the concept of toxic masculinity (Harrington 2020) and reposition women (and feminists) as perpetrators of discrimination against men (Anderson 2023; McCann 2022). Perhaps resultantly, much of the backlash against the film reflects elements of anxiety about men's shifting role within the patriarchy, as well as anger at feminists (and perhaps by proxy, women) as the actors perpetuating these shifts.

Despite the frivolity of a movie such as *Barbie*, the scale of the social discourse about the movie is perhaps indicative of the importance of feminism in the current Western social discourse. Social movements such as #MeToo in 2016 (Flood 2019) and the Women's March on Washington in 2017 (Britannica 2017) called for a renewed focus on gender inequality, and feminism by extension. Many of these initiatives seek to specifically engage men in feminist allyship, as evidenced by the increased presence of organizations like the White Ribbon Campaign on Canadian University campuses, or "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" events, wherein men are called to take direct action to reduce violence against women (Kimmel 2010; Bridges 2010). Men are also able to engage with feminism through more indirect, institutional avenues, visible through the increase in roles for men in violence prevention sectors (Messner 2016). Taking these into consideration, it is evident that not only is feminism of value in contemporary Western society but there is also an increased awareness that men are of value to feminism.

While men are of value to feminism, hooks (2000), Tarrant (2009), and countless other feminist scholars have also argued that feminism is equally of value to men. Despite the reality that women and others of marginalized gender identities might be the predominantly oppressed categories within the patriarchy, the benefits of patriarchy do not extend equally across the category of men (hooks 2000). Consider for example the ways that queer men are disadvantaged due to their misalignment with a key feature of hegemonic masculinity (heterosexuality), resulting in their masculinity being stereotyped as subordinate (Messner 2016). Another such example would be the ways that men are restricted in terms of self-expression, as hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy function in tandem to reinforce restrictive binary views of gendered expression (Kimmel 2005). Taking these examples into consideration, it is apparent that through engaging in feminist activism focused on dismantling patriarchal structures, both men and

women (as well as trans, non-binary, and others whose gender identities are marginalized) would be liberated from restrictive social norms, hypothetically creating a more just, equitable society (hooks 2000; Tarrant 2009).

Despite feminists having long asserted that men would also benefit from dismantling the patriarchy, research indicates that men are often much less inclined to engage in feminism than others. While both men and women are likely to agree with feminist attitudes, men are much less likely to identify as feminists (Breen and Karpinski 2008; Zucker and Bay-Cheng 2010). In research exploring how students define feminism, when compared with a cohort of women of the same demographic, men are much more likely to perceive feminists as “man-hating” and aggressive, and much more likely to be linked to traditional gender roles (Ogletree, Diaz and Padilla 2017). The internalization of negative views of feminists, while simultaneously being in support of feminist values, illustrates a barrier to engaging men in gender justice activism, despite the potential benefits that feminism would offer men (Breen and Karpinski 2008; Zucker and Bay-Cheng 2010). This further inhibits the achievement of gender equality, as when men identify as feminists rather than supporters of feminist thought, they are more likely to participate in addressing gendered discrimination (Zucker and Bay-Cheng 2010). Considering that within Western patriarchal societies, men experience the greatest degree of social capital and agency, engaging men in feminism is crucial to developing long-lasting solutions to gender inequality (Herbert 2007; hooks 2000).

While engaging men broadly in addressing gender inequality is of high priority, some demographics might be more inclined to engage with feminism than others. For example, students and younger generations are often the actors most engaged in pushing forth progress, as seen in the anti-war student activism of the 60s for example (Jacoby 2017). In the context of

feminism, Bettencourt et al. (2011) found that older generations are often much more conservative in their beliefs, and thus more resistant to engaging with feminism than younger generations (Bettencourt et al. 2011: 871). Resultantly, one would conclude that younger generations would be more positively aligned with feminism, as feminist values become more intertwined into university curriculum and structure it becomes less stigmatizing, resulting in a higher uptake of feminist values (Liss et al. 2000). Furthermore, younger generations are being raised with an increased awareness of the nuances of oppression, and thus they might have more positive associations with social justice movements broadly (Bettencourt et al. 2011: 871). As such, while it is of importance to engage men broadly in social justice activism, younger generations may be more inclined to engage, as well as have more opportunities to enact social change given the characteristics associated with their demographic.

Despite evidence that younger generations are more engaged with social justice, existing research has demonstrated that there is a continuing disconnect between the ways that young men feel about feminist attitudes and their willingness to identify with the feminist movement (Breen and Karpinski 2008; Houvouras and Carter 2008; Ogletree et al. 2017). However, these three studies are all focused on young men's understanding of feminism within an American context and despite there being various similarities between the two countries, Canadian and American students may reflect considerable differences in opinions, socialization, and politics. Moreover, much of the literature that is available exploring men and feminism is most often focused on their identification with the label, rather than exploring the ways that men may understand feminism and what contributes to this understanding. Given that there is a desperate need for men to engage in feminism and mobilize their social power, it is important to explore

men's understanding and engagement with feminism in greater depth, and within the context of distinct social, cultural and historic locations.

The purpose of this study is to explore some of the ways that young men enrolled at the University of Victoria understand and engage with feminism. The research questions that guide this project are 1. How do young men understand and engage with feminism? What factors influence this relationship? And 2. How do men's relationship to feminism reflect their interpretations of norms of masculinity? Chapter 2 reviews theories and debates about men's role in feminism, as well as provides a high level historical overview of the North American feminist movement. Chapter 3 establishes the methods employed in this research including the recruitment strategies, participants involved in this study, procedure, and basis for analysis. Chapter 4 details the data collected during participant interviews, presenting some of the most common themes emerging from these conversations. Finally, Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the implications of these data, discussing some of the ways these men negotiate their understanding of masculinity in their relationship with feminism. Participants expressed feeling excluded from feminism due to its woman-centric status, as well as the ability to enact feminist values in their lives without identifying as a feminist. Overall, this study suggests that young men's understanding of feminism transcends binary acceptance or rejection, and is often intertwined with their understanding of masculinity and performance of their gender. Furthermore, this research illustrates some of the ways that young men are currently grappling with shifting hegemonic norms of masculinity, and the potential consequences that may have on their understanding of their role in social change and gender equality.

Literature Review

Establishing “Feminism”

The word ‘feminism’ is most often used to refer to a base-line concept that asserts that women are discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity across sectors, meaning that there would need to be social, economic, and political change in order to resolve this inequality (Delmar 2001). Beyond this, feminist theories diversify, resulting in streams of thought such as Indigenous feminist theories (Starblanket 2024), Queer theory (Butler 1990), and feminist disability studies (Garland-Thomson 2005), to name only a few. To that end, it is best to understand feminism as rooted times, places, and within specific socio-cultural contexts (Herbert 2007). As reviewing feminism broadly would be much too large in scope for the current project at hand, the following section offers a high-level overview of the “waves” of Western feminism in North America. Briefly, first wave feminist activism is generally associated with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries followed by second wave feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Third wave feminist activism emerged in the 1990s, and the fourth wave is often used to describe the renewed focus on gender equality beginning in 2012 (Henry, 2011). While scholars such as Henry (2011), Evans and Chamberlain (2014), and Hewitt (2012) have rightly critiqued the analogy of “waves” as being reductive and overly simplistic, due to its significance in the social discourse of feminism, I will be using it here to highlight the historical trends in feminist activism and thought in North America. Further, despite its shortcomings, the metaphor of “waves” enables the discussion of the political and social events that cause a surge of action rather than generational or other identity markers as the delineation between different groupings of feminist activism, and therefore it continues to serve a purpose in discussion of feminism (Evans and Chamberlain 2014).

First wave feminism.

“First wave” feminism is generally associated with the suffragette movement and is used to refer to movements and political actions that indicated a shift in commitment towards achieving equality markers for women of the early twentieth century. However, many scholars have highlighted that feminist ideas were present and circulating in the United States well before the suffragette movement gained visibility (Kinser 2004: 127). The first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, and is often lauded as an example of first-wave feminism before the suffragette wave began (Kinser 2004: 127). Scholars such as Kinser (2004) have argued that when considering the embodiment of feminist ideas, the African American women’s movement within the abolitionist movement, as well as the role of First Nation American women in the embodiment and presentation of feminist ideas, present other sites of early feminist organizing (128). This is further evidenced as throughout the 1800s, African American activists were already publicly campaigning for the rights to property and wages, rights to equal education and political voice, as well as rights to guardianship over their children (Kinser 2004: 128). Thus, when the Seneca Falls convention and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 took place, the goals of the feminist movement were already alive and well (Kinser 2004; Hewitt 2010).

Despite the ambiguity of the emergence of first-wave feminism, consistently the first wave within a Western context is most commonly associated with the suffragettes, and the right to vote as an extension of the right of personhood (Evans and Chamberlain 2014). However, this focus on the right to vote for women and recognition of personhood was specific to white middle-class women, as when faced with the possibility that black men may gain personhood as well through this new social justice activism, suffragette feminists chose to align with white men

to ensure the success of the movement (hooks 2000). Consequently, the goals of the first wave were very much aligned with white women's specific progress, in particular advocating for their similarity to men through formal policy reforms and formal right to participate in politics (Rome et al. 2019). This is particularly the case when considering that the ideas and practices of the Haudenosaunee Iroquois women, as well as black women's activism within the abolitionist movement that later informed suffragist activism, yet are often unacknowledged in telling's of "first wave feminism" (Kinser 2004), beckoning the common critique that the first wave narrowly focused on the rights of middle and upper-class women's access to political voice.

Second wave feminism.

The "second wave" of feminism began around the 1960s and represented a shift in the focus of feminist activism from the recognition of personhood to the workplace. Second-wave activists coined their movement "the second wave" in an attempt to destigmatize their advocacy for women by connecting to feminist achievements that had already been socially accepted, such as the right to vote (Kinser 2004). Continuing to build on the success of the first wave, the second wave focused on women's "rights" rather than "liberation," arguing for more equitable division of labor in the home, increasing women's access to sexual and reproductive care (birth control, access to safe and legal abortions, to name a few), and arguing for workplace equality in terms of wages and safe working environments (Kinser 2004:129; Ryan 2019). This advocacy often involved the universalizing of women, asserting that within the patriarchy, all women are inherently oppressed due to their gender identity (Kearney 2012).

Within the second wave, various streams of feminist thought and advocacy emerged. Radical feminist activism began early in the second wave, emphasizing the division of labour in North America and the need for recognizing unpaid, domestic labour performed predominantly

by women (Kearney 2012: 26). In radical feminist discourse, patriarchy is conceptualized as a social system wherein all men dominate women implicitly by virtue of their gender identity (Kearney 2012: 27). Resultantly, within radical feminist discourse men are conceived as inherently wicked and inclined to dominate women by any means necessary, but specifically physically (Kearney 2012: 28). As a result, radical feminist activists argued that women needed to distance themselves from men in order to achieve liberation, arguing at times for lesbianism as a necessary political choice (Kearney 2012: 28). To maintain this distance from men, radical feminists also argued for women to establish their own means of communication which could not be infiltrated by men, as media was also designated as a tool of the oppressor (Kearney 2012: 28). Worthy of note, radical feminism is most often critiqued as incredibly reductive and idealistic in its strategies, not the least of which being the assumption that women would be implicitly in solidarity with one another because of their shared gender identity and would thus overcome other power hierarchies and differences of opinion (Kearney 2012: 28). As a result, Kearney (2012) argues that radical feminism has not seen substantial success in attracting actors outside of its existing groups to the feminist movement, and thus has not contributed substantially to overarching liberation.

Radical feminism declined in the start of the second wave, giving rise to liberal feminism in the latter part of the second wave (Kearney 2012: 26). Liberal feminism focused on the need for women's equality with men in public domains, primarily calling for change through policy (Kearney 2012: 27). Specifically, liberal feminist discourse suggested that women should focus on entering male dominated fields in society, thus acquiring more power, eventually leading to greater gender equality (Kearney 2012: 27). In order to accomplish this, liberal feminists advocated for policy that protected women entering the workforce, such as legislation enforcing

equal wages for workers regardless of gender identity (Kearney 2012: 27). However, while the need for policy shifts to support equality in the public sphere is required, liberal feminism is often critiqued as neglecting to improve the conditions of inequality that women face in the private sphere (Kearney 2012:27). Consequently, liberal feminism is often critiqued for creating a ‘superwoman’ stereotype wherein women are required to perform at a high level in male-centric work environments, while simultaneously continuing to maintain domestic ideals (Kearney 2012: 27). Resultantly, liberal feminism, perhaps inadvertently, reinforces the oppression of women by creating impossible standards for women to meet without dismantling the patriarchal forces that establish these norms in the first place.

While second wave feminism claimed to encompass further diversity of identity in its goals for equality through expanding the fight for political voice to include inequality in the domestic sphere, it is worth noting that it is often critiqued as being reductive in its scope. Many scholars have critiqued the second wave as universalizing the identity of “woman,” inadvertently asserting that there is a consistent and inherent experience of womanhood (Snyder 2008). While this universal “woman” is often argued by theorists as a way to engage folks in social activism by constructing a unifying identity, others have called out this strategy as universalizing and reductionist, falling back upon stereotypes and socialization that normalize white, middle-class womanhood over any other (hooks 2000; Hebert 2007; Snyder 2008). As a result, despite the emergence of new streams of feminism and a commitment to diversifying the focus of feminist activism, the second wave is often linked to the same stereotypes of “white middle-class woman” feminism associated with the first wave (Hebert 2007; Snyder 2008).

Third wave feminism.

The “third wave” of feminism begins around the 1990s and continued to build on the diversification of actors involved in feminist organizing as reflected in the second wave. However, the third wave of feminism introduced a new approach to feminist activism and is often noted as introducing three responses to theoretical challenges posed by second-wave feminism. First, third-wave feminists challenged the collapse of the category of “woman” associated with the second-wave, calling for a more intersectional version of feminism (Snyder 2008:175). Second, the third wave calls for “multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical orientation” (Snyder 2008:175), highlighting the need to reprioritize following the rise of postmodernism in the ’80s. Finally, the third wave is noted as emphasizing inclusivity and nonjudgmental approaches to activism, rejecting the narrative of feminism that operates within the realm of hermeneutic critique and instead replacing it with a welcoming politic of coalition (Snyder 2008: 176).

The exact timeline of the third wave of feminism is somewhat contested, as when Rebecca Walker, daughter of well-known second-wave activist Alice Walker, stated in the media “I am the third wave” in 1992, she effectively insinuated an end to second-wave feminism, while the second wave was still active in some regards (Henry 2011). However, this marked a shift in themes in the waves of feminism, as Walker called for women of her generation to take up the banner of feminism in their own way, emphasizing a need to challenge the doings of second-wave feminism if they proved less relevant for a new generation of activists (Henry 2011). Walker is quoted as stating that second-wave feminism was too restrictive for a generation of activists that had “grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist and other afflicted” (Snyder 2008:175). Thus, the third wave is known for

its critique of second-wave feminism as too reductive in its conceptualization of gender and liberation, calling for further intersectionality in the approach to advocating for gender equality, while also tackling the social construction of race and gender (Butler 1990; Henry 2011). The third wave is also noted as embracing a more feminine and sex-positive approach to feminist activism, sometimes to the deficit of second-wave feminism by stereotyping the entire wave as frumpy and rigid (Snyder 2008: 175). Thus, while the third wave is notable for its radical steps towards inclusion, there are also critiques of the revisionist history approach that conflated second-wave feminism with anti-sex perspectives, ironically falling into the reductionist and generalized critique that the third wave alleges was common in the second wave.

A fourth wave of feminism.

Finally, following the third wave of feminism is a contested fourth wave. As is common with any social movement inciting massive social change, there is an inevitable question of the continued relevance of the movement after a point. In the realm of feminism, postfeminist ideologies emerged arguably during the third wave, and most certainly have characterized the fourth wave of feminism (Kinser 2004). Post-feminism is often associated with backlash, assertions that equality has been achieved and thus any further feminist activism will cause a reversal of the alleged equality achieved (Kinser 2004: 134). However, despite assertions that feminism has achieved all it can, the presence of the fourth wave of feminism, as well as various contemporary social events, suggests there is still a need to contend with elements of gendered inequality in our world (Kinser 2004: 147). Specifically, the fourth wave is often discussed as renewing its focus on sexualized violence against women, the continued need to advocate for equality for LGBTQ+ individuals, and fighting attacks on reproductive healthcare and access to bodily autonomy (Peroni and Rodak 2020). This can be seen through the prevalence of the #MeToo campaign as

an instigator to ignite new feminist activism in 2010, wherein women began to come forth detailing their experiences of sexualized and gendered violence within the workplace (not so dissimilar to the focus of second-wave feminism). Despite these components reflecting similarities to the second and third wave of feminism, the global connection of this movement through leveraging new communication tools is noted as reflecting a new emergent wave of feminism (Peroni and Rodak 2020: 5S). Thus, the fourth wave is in many ways linked to the proliferation of digital feminism, wherein some scholars have noted that the fourth wave of feminism is a hybrid of new technologies and older ideas (Rome et al. 2019; Peroni and Rodak 2020: 8S).

Because of developments in technology, such as the internet, social media, and smart phones, many fourth-wave activist movements have leveraged social media and digital modes of organizing, often overcoming some of the limitations of earlier grassroots feminism grounded in solely local contexts (Rome et al. 2019). This new type of activism, sometimes referred to as “Hashtag Feminism” (Munro 2013), reflects new trends wherein feminist organizing can make connections on an intersectional, intergeneration, and transnational scale (Peroni and Rodak 2020). Of interest, this has also sparked a renewed interest in the relationship between the state and gendered and sexual discrimination, highlighted in social movements such as the “Pussyhat” and “women's march” in Washington, as well as the protests in places like Poland and South American wherein women have faced significant barriers to pushing through legislation protecting reproductive choice and preventing sexualized and capitalist exploitation of women (Peroni and Rodak 2020: 8S). These protests are visible at an increased rate because of the leverage of digital tools such as social media, enabling groups around the world to join in a type of alliance, mimicking in some ways the calls of “sisterhood” of past waves (Peroni and Rodak

2020: 8S). Additionally, this sisterhood takes a more progressive approach than even the intersectional predecessor of the third wave, calling for an anti-essentialist approach to feminism which welcomes diverse experiences of all individuals, including men (Peroni and Rodak 2020: 8S). As a result, this “sisterhood” of the fourth wave is often conceptualized as being grounded in empathy and understanding, leveraging honest mutual support, and seeking collaboration to achieve common action for liberation (Peroni and Rodak 2020: 8S).

The Man Question: Who Can Be a Feminist?

Despite the vast range of different philosophies and practices that fall under the umbrella of “feminism”, most frequently at the very core of feminist beliefs is the recognition that gender exists within hierarchical relations, positioning men as superior to women generally within the patriarchy (Hebert 2007). Consequently, feminist theorizing consistently focuses on the disruption of masculine privileges and power (Hebert 2007). However, while scholars do consistently agree that feminism functions as a potential path to disrupt masculine power and privilege, there is also a lack of agreement over whether men as actors associated with masculinity may occupy space within feminism. Building on a trend of universalizing womanhood in the second wave of feminism, some scholars have advocated that to engage in work that seeks to liberate women from oppressive forces, feminism thus needed to establish boundaries to create safe spaces for women within feminist explorations (Hebert 2007). While this was undeniably necessary in some spaces to protect the organization of feminism, the sentiment that feminism and feminist organizing reflect an exclusive girls-only club has potentially contributed to the alienation of men from engaging with feminism (hooks 2000). Further, this is reflected in some early radical feminist theorizing that asserts men’s compatibility with feminism by virtue of their gender alignment with patriarchal power, perpetuating the

binary interpretation that feminism is inherent to womanhood (Herbert 2007). Despite these inconsistencies in feminist theorizing of the role of men in feminism, there are some consistencies in the worries about the challenges of incorporating men into feminism and feminist allyship. This section explores some of the main worries found in feminist theorizing of men in feminism, highlighting historical examples wherein these worries have come to fruition or been challenged by men's allyship.

There are uncontestedly legitimate reasons that some feminists have expressed concern or hesitation about men being feminists. Some have feared that the inclusion of men's perspectives might reduce the focus of feminism on women's liberation, if not contribute to the erasure or subordination of women from yet another sphere (Tarrant 2009). Scholars such as Tania Modleski (2001) have argued that allowing men to become spokespeople for feminism perpetuates the constraints of masculine universalism on women's production of knowledge and power. According to Modleski (1991), this hampers the ability of the movement to achieve liberation for women by continuing to implicitly uphold patriarchal constraints and mainstream feminism in alignment with the male default. This perspective is commonly associated with the sense that society has reached a postfeminist status, wherein feminism and women have ceased to be politically relevant actors, and feminism is assumed to have achieved its goals (Modleski 1991). Some scholars have argued that this is already happening through the production of media content that normalizes gender inequality, such as through the consumption of media content that presents women as strong, independent characters yet normalizes male violence against women (Collins and Rothe 2017; Modleski 1991). Further, as the media is often characterized as a patriarchal entity and continues to perpetuate images of hypersexualized and submissive women as the norm, often theorists assert that this is an example of what might

happen if men became more involved in grassroots feminism as well as structural entities (Collins and Rothe 2017; Modleski 1991). Resultantly, this worry over men's inclusion in feminism is potentially more visible in practice in structural experiences of inequality, such as through reductive portrayals of women in media, or affirmative action hiring practices that claim to be grounded in equity yet inadvertently tokenize diversity.

A second reason that some may be cautious about men's inclusion in feminism could be the worry that feminism might be warped to focus on the ways that men are oppressed by masculinity, distracting from the severe violence that many others outside of the category of men also face under the patriarchy (Tarrant 2009). Historically, this has been leveraged by men's rights groups, who have co-opted feminist language to appear as aligned with gender equality yet focus entirely on returning power to "disempowered" men (Messner 1998). Consider for example the men's liberation groups of the 70s, groups that directly took inspiration from earlier feminist movements and advocated for men's involvement in deconstructing the patriarchy. While these groups asserted they were aligned with the feminist movement of the 70s, research has since highlighted that the men's liberation movement was more concerned with the harm done to men by the limits of the male sex role than with challenging and deconstructing patriarchal privilege (Messner 1998; Messner et al. 2015). Notably, feminist advocates identified that this alleged embodiment of feminist activism was much more focused on individual liberation than the overthrow of structural oppression, meaning that "liberated men, it seemed, could now get in touch with their feelings and still feel good about their status, power, and privilege over others" (Messner et al. 2015: 265). Thus, while the men's liberation movements of the 1970s aimed at embodying and engaging with feminist activism through mobilizing men, there are critiques that the movement oversimplified the calls for gender equality by focusing

primarily on one form of inequality experienced by a specific group of men, rather than engaging with gender equality for those of diverse racial, sexual, and class identities (Messner et al. 2015).

A third reason some feminists have worried about the inclusion of men in feminism is the suspicion that feminist men are not as committed to the movement as others, and may be performatively engaging in activism to suit their own agendas (Tarrant 2009). Interestingly, this worry is not limited to feminists who are women, as research conducted with men also finds that men are highly skeptical of other men's feminist identities. Holmgren and Hearn (2009) explore this theory in their research with pro-feminist Swedish men. Based on interviews, participants expressed frustration at the accessibility of claiming feminist identity without proving any kind of commitment to feminist values:

“It seems too easy to call oneself ‘feminist’ in Sweden today from the group’s point of view; many men’s groups are simply not ‘for real’ although they may get a lot of media attention. (409).

Here, the authors highlight the challenges associated with perceiving feminist men as being valid, as even within their study with other pro-feminist men, participants expressed a high degree of criticism and skepticism of men involved with feminism (Holmgren and Hearn 2009). This skepticism was linked to the perception that despite sharing the value of feminism, other men would leverage feminist alignment for their individual gain to garner approval from feminist women, or through leveraging a “feminist” identity to advance in a professional setting (Modleski 1991).

Perhaps rather than question whether men can be feminists, the discussion should instead focus on how and why feminism would benefit from men's inclusion. While some scholars have questioned the role of men in feminism, there are others who argue that men's engagement within feminism is crucial to pushing forth gender and social justice. For example, Tarrant

(2009) argues that “if men do not take active roles in resolving the politics of housework, male violence against women, hiring and wage disparities, or gender bias in the media, then women are talking into a feminist echo chamber” (Tarrant 2009:105). Thus, the tendency to conflate feminism with women becomes newly apparent, as Tarrant highlights the challenges with this association limiting the existential inclusion and pragmatic application of individuals outside of the category of “woman” in its plight. Other scholars such as Herbert (2007) have echoed this, stating that feminism continues to be limited in terms of creating lasting social change, as “women acting alone are not enough to oppose the momentum of the prevailing social arrangement or to galvanize a critical mass of society willing to adopt new behaviors and interactions” (Herbert 2007:41).

Through relying on a binary conceptualization of gender, feminism further excludes those whose identities challenge the binary, such as trans or nonbinary individuals (Hines 2006). This has also been discussed in the context of “ideal feminist identities” (Hines 2006:75), wherein feminist identity is based on the assignment of female sex. This places obvious limitations both on cisgendered men in terms of allyship, but also further functions to alienate trans and nonbinary folks from the feminist movement. Additionally, given that not who are assigned female at birth identify as women, as well as not all women behave in alignment with feminism, the notion that the assignment of female sex should be the determining factor in whether someone is a feminist is absurd and illogical. Rather, as Hines (2006) argues, rather than continuing assume feminist identity is inherent to female sex assignment, we might instead conceptualize a feminist as “one who acts in concert with feminist ideals, thus political practice rather than gender or sex lies at the heart of feminist identity” (76). If feminism continues to be discussed as solely linked to women, then there is an assumption that women universally share

the same understanding of the need for gender equality, and thus sex and gender become the site of all determining variables in individual participation in social justice (Tarrant 2009). In doing so, masculinity and men and femininity and women being collapsed leads to the assumption that feminist men are oxymoronic, reinforcing a dichotomy that feminism claims to want to subvert (Tarrant 2009; Kimmel 1987). Therefore, it is possible to see how shifting the definition of feminist from sex assignment to instead behavior and commitment to ideals, not only would feminism hold space for the ways that those outside of the gender identity of “woman” have historically engaged, but also this would likely further encourage folks of diverse identities to engage in gender justice activism.

A Brief History of Men’s Engagement with Feminism

Despite concern over whether men can behave as feminists, there are significant examples of men who have individually and collectively engaged with feminism. While there is room to debate the ambiguity of when and which demographics of men engaged with feminism historically, the 1970s are considered to be a significant decade for men’s engagement with feminism. Rather than tackle the entirety of men’s engagement with feminism over the last 50 years, I offer some key moments and themes linked to specific cohorts’ experience with feminism at various points in time as contextualized examples of men’s engagements with feminism.

It is worth noting that diverse groups of men have been engaged in pro-feminist allyship and activism for decades, if not centuries, longer than is noted in academic literature. For example, consider black men who have engaged in liberation work, engaging with feminism through abolitionist activism (Schmitz and Haltom 2017). Additionally, queer men have long engaged in feminist allyship, through their work in consciousness development around cultural

institutions and the role of institutions in contributing to the hatred, fear, and bigotry that queer men often face resulting from their deviance from hegemonic patriarchal masculinity (Brod and Kaufman 1994). As a result, there is a need to acknowledge that much of the research available is predominantly focused on white, cisgender, middle-class men within a specific Western context, specifically beginning with the 1970s. Further, if we consider resistance as an assertion of agency, then it is possible to consider men's resistance to feminism as a form of active engagement with the concept (Flood 2015) Thus, this section will highlight some of the dominant themes found in the literature exploring men's engagement with feminism from 1970s onwards.

The 1970s grassroots.

The 1970s presented a generation of young people who came of age during the radical social movement activism of the 1960s, further opening their interest and acceptance of social activism (Messner 2016). These groups emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were spurred on by second wave feminist success in North America (Fox 2005; Messner 2016:7). Men who engaged in feminist advocacy during this period were largely engaged in other progressive social movements at the time such as the antiwar movements, student movements, or the civil rights movement, all of which directly or indirectly introduced men to feminist women (Messner et al. 2015). Their feminist engagement often took the form of men's liberation groups, taking inspiration from women's liberation movement language and organizing of the previous decades (Messner 1997; Messner 1998; Messner et al. 2015). These groups acknowledged that sexism was a problem for women and identified that feminism was necessary as a social movement for addressing gender inequities, while simultaneously stressing that there were also high costs to the health of men resulting from their role within patriarchal capitalist social structures (Messner

1997; Messner 2016). Many of these groups connected the binary limitations that the female sex role imposed on women to limitations that the male sex role imposed on men, such as the encouragement of stoicism, lack of empathy for others, encouragement of risk taking, and unhealthy habits such as smoking or excessive drinking (Messner 2016: 8).

However, while there was a marked emergence of pro-feminist men's groups in the 1970s, the decade also marked an emergence of anti-feminist groups. Messner (1998) highlights the manner through which these groups co-opted the language used by women's liberationists to emphasize solely the cost of masculinity, such as the need to be a financial provider to a family and the disenfranchisement of men in the workforce. This rhetoric often attributed men's hardships to the increase in rights for women, eventually leading to the emergence of "men's rights groups" as a new embodiment of antifeminist sentiment (Messner 1998: 257) Where men's liberationists tended to emphasize that men could experience hardships while also benefiting from their privilege, men's rights movements emerged to assert that men's privilege was a myth due to the rigidity of their role as the capitalist breadwinner, a role they allegedly played to support the women in their lives (Messner 1998: 265). Particularly regarding child rearing and marriage, men's rights movements asserted that sexuality, marriage and divorce laws were systematically created to ensure that men were beholden to the women they married, to their disadvantage (Messner 1998: 266). Ultimately, not only did these groups fixate on feminism as a movement that furthered men's disadvantage by focusing on women, this trend in antifeminist sentiment would continue into the coming decades (Messner 1998; Messner 2016).

The 1980s and 1990s: Transition to professionalization.

Men's success with grassroots feminist organizing continued to gain momentum through the 1980s and 90s and maintained its growth over the late decades of the twentieth century. Building

on the success of smaller, localized consciousness-raising efforts, men's liberation groups also began to create more extensive social networks to encourage social action-focused men to connect. For example, in Ontario, Canada, a network called the Men's Network for Change hosted annual conferences for men to connect and discuss both local and regional-focused social action initiatives to reduce violence against women. Another common occurrence of public support for gender equality outlined by Kaufman (2001) was short-term campaigns organized by men with social capital, such as politicians, expressing public support and engaging with women-led feminist movements. These campaigns were often small and local affairs, though effective when considering that focusing attention on localized efforts to engage men with feminist activism may provide an opportunity for outreach and consciousness-raising with men who may not have access to large urban settings, often where social movements are most visible (Kaufman 2001).

As these campaigns gained success both socially, and through the incorporation of feminism-aligned individuals in institutions such as provincial and federal governments, men's feminist engagement also took the form of non-profits focused on anti-violence work, such as the White Ribbon Campaign (Kaufman 2001). While the shift to more formalized organizations enabled men to focus in on specific areas aligned with feminist values, this also contributed to a reduction in the overtly radical rhetoric consistent with earlier waves of feminism, for example focusing on specific elements of violence prevention in lieu of overarching liberation for women (Messner 2016). According to Messner, Greenberg and Peretz. (2015), when movements began to gain steam and accept funding from governments, so to emerged a need to demonstrate that the work being done was adequately addressing some level of social issues in order to continue to receive funding, which reduced their capacity to advocate for radical broad social change. In

this way, it's arguable that movement feminism receded from public view and became instead interwoven in a neoliberal embodiment within institutions such as government and policing by way of affirmative action and funding for selected strategies to address gender inequality (Messner et al. 2015; Messner 2016).

Concurrent with the reduction in public view of movement feminism, a new discourse of "post-feminism" emerged in the 1990s (Messner 2016; Kearney 2012). The concept of post-feminism states that gender equality has already been achieved and that feminism has ceased to provide the valuable roles and insights it once did (Butler 2013). Post-feminism also functions similarly to neoliberalism asserting that advocacy is less needed, and that individual rights and choices are of high importance (Butler 2013). The emergence of post-feminist rhetoric as the third wave was coming to a close lent itself to antifeminist groups. These groups took up this perspective in their arguments, stating that feminist collective action was no longer required (Messner 2016). Particularly as post-feminism and neoliberalism overlap in the call for women to "work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill and Scharff 2011:7), the rhetoric of post-feminism espousing women's need to self-regulate gaining steam as the visibility of public feminism declined reinforced antifeminist men's groups of the validity of their calls for the death of feminism and a refocusing on men's issues (Messner 2016).

Compounding the negative impact of this rhetoric, as the postfeminist discourse was emerging in the 1990s, so too was a public discourse which denoted the decline of men. The recession of the 1980s in the United States and the resulting economic collapse left many men in a position of threat when they suddenly became unable to financially provide for their families, which meant they therefore failed to meet their traditional norms (Messner 2016). This continued

into the 1990s, as more and more careers became professionalized and women began to fill an array of lower-paying and service sector roles (Messner 2016). Specifically in the case of working-class men, the unstable foundation of the male breadwinner role and shifting social expectations for young men triggered renewed gendered anxiety (Connell 1995). Thus, as men's rights became seemingly less and women's rights increased through structural shifts such as affirmative hiring and inclusive educational curriculums, this sense of aggrieved entitlement became even deeper and woven into antifeminist groups of the era, and continued into the new millennium. Kimmel (2013) explains, rather than acknowledging the structural issues of neoliberal economic policies, that anti-feminist groups developed a sense of aggrieved entitlement. This sense of aggrieved entitlement has led to the adoption of rhetoric that masculinity is in crisis, specifically regarding gendered and racial disenfranchisement. Thus, anti-feminist sentiments in general often take the form of advocating for men's rights that are allegedly under attack, implying an implicit anti-feminist sentiment which is likely to resonate amongst men who feel insecure and unsure of their social role in an ever-evolving world wherein their traditional gender roles are continuously challenged (Kimmel 2013).

The 2000s onwards: New platforms for feminism.

Contemporarily, the rhetoric of post-feminism and the adoption of neoliberal policies continue within social discourse and institutions. Building on trends in the previous decades, men continued to engage with feminism through non-profits and feminist aligned positions within governments, contributing to the creation of antisexist government policies, crisis response centers on University Campuses, and gender inclusive curriculums at various levels of the education system (Messner et al. 2015). These positions are often reflective of liberal beliefs of equality; one need look no further than the current prime minister of Canada's statement

regarding the equal representation of women and men in the cabinet justified as “Because it’s 2015” (PMC 2015) as an example of the institutional embodiment of men’s contemporary pro feminist engagement.

In addition to the trend of institutionalized pro-feminist engagement, men have also engaged with feminism contemporarily in response to the #MeToo movement, a social movement dedicated to raising awareness of the scope of sexualized and gendered violence women face in both the private and public spheres (cite this). The #MeToo movement tasks men with three things to be effective allies; 1. "To listen to women, 2. To change their own sexist and harassing behaviour, and 3. To take collective action to prevent and reduce violence and abuse” (Flood 2019). There are various signs of organized responses to the movement amongst pro-feminist men, both within and outside of existing anti-violence men's networks. Some of these signs have taken the form of public consciousness-raising initiatives, such as the #AskMoreOfHim campaign in 2018, which challenged men to mobilize their privilege for good in addressing sexual harassment and call their peers to action as well. Additionally, men's networks and organizations have attempted to offer reflections on # MeToo's significance and encouraged men to engage in difficult conversations with other men in their lives when identifying behaviour that promotes the degradation of women. However, despite local initiatives renewing their commitment to engaging in violence reduction activism, there has yet to be a significant collective international increase in men's commitment to anti-violence advocacy (Flood 2019).

Outside of #MeToo and institutionalized roles, men’s pro feminist engagement has also shifted into other forms, such as engaging in short term activism through events such as “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” (Bridges 2010). While this diversity of option for pro feminist engagement

invites more men to engage in new ways, there are also critiques to be leveraged of the lack of uniformity and accountability for men to embody feminist ideals in their day to day lives. In some ways men's current engagement with pro feminist attitudes and activism is "in principle", meaning that men are now generally more positively inclined towards gender equality, but in practice they may not employ this attitude in their own interactions and relationships (Nilson and Gunnarsson 2020). This also presents a challenge in men's engagement with feminism, as not only is there a lack of uniformity to determine whether they *are* engaging, there is also a subsequent lack of criteria for holding men who claim the label of feminist accountable to act in alignment with the values of the movement.

The lack of uniformity of men's contemporary pro-feminist engagement is made considerably more problematic with the current debatable uniformity of men's antifeminist movements. The adoption of the worldwide web and the popularization of social media led to an increased sense of freedom for many as information became easily and instantaneously accessible. However, as Ging (2019) outlines, it has also given rise to a new location for recruitment and community building for anti-feminist men's groups through the form of the "manosphere", a collective of groups drawn together by their commitment to anti-feminist rhetoric, often embodied through the cultural trope of the red pill. The essential rhetoric espoused by these groups tends to be embodied through extreme misogyny, reliance on evolutionary psychology, a tendency towards personal attacks of those outside of their group, and engagement with more individualistic politics (Ging 2019). These groups also share beliefs that men are oppressed and victimized by feminism, and resultantly adopt extreme and broadly anti-women rhetoric (Ging 2019). Of additional worry, while the manosphere has been present in theory since the early 2000s, its activities have increased recently in response to the growth of online feminist

discourses consistent with fourth wave activism (Dickel and Evolvi 2023:1393). Following the rise of #MeToo and an increase in feminist sentiment socially, these groups have increased their proliferation of calls to “re-establish the patriarchy”, calling for violence both explicitly against women through actions such as school and mass shootings, as well as implicitly through the degradation of women through slurs and violent language (Dickel and Evolvi 2023).

By examining the trends in men’s engagement with feminism over the last 50 years, it is possible to see that whether through joining grassroots activism, pursuing institutionalized feminist roles, or resisting feminist calls to action, men are in many ways engaged with feminism. One commonality seen across cohorts and across the perspective taken by men (pro or anti-feminist) is that often these movements emerge in response to social events occurring during the decade in which these movements are set. In the case of the 1970s, men's liberation movements drew inspiration from the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, attempting to recreate similar formats to inspire consciousness-raising and affirmative action. As the past decade has included various massive social changes, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the popularity of the Black Lives Matter movement, Say Her Name, as well as a debatable increase in public consciousness of the nuance of privilege and oppression, it is an opportune time to explore how men are currently engaging with feminism within the contemporary social context.

Factors Influencing (or Inhibiting) Men's Engagement with Feminism

When considering factors that may inform men’s willingness to engage with feminism, there is a never-ending stream of possibilities as to how and why men might (or might not) engage with feminism. Some theorists have posited that to properly understand a social movement, one must see oneself reflected in it; meaning that if men want to understand feminism, they must also be able to see their identity as being tied to it (Herbert 2007). Other theorists have offered concepts

of multiple or hybrid masculinities, arguing that men who experience less privilege within the patriarchy might have different perspectives of feminism and the need for gender equality (Bridges 2010; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Ultimately, the number of potential factors informing men's engagement with feminism is infinite, and thus this section will summarize only a few of the most common theories and discussions found in the literature.

Identifying inequality.

There are many explanations offered in the literature contextualizing why and how men may engage with feminism. For example, if feminism is framed as the ideology that delegitimizes sexist beliefs, men are often in support of feminism when they are more aware of sexism (Drury and Kaiser 2014). On a similar note, when men are more aware of the implicit bias found in contemporary society that functions to privilege men over others, they are more likely to report seeing more incidents of sexism. Thus, in many ways, the understanding of feminism and the willingness to confront inequality can be linked to the understanding of sexism, rather than the actual word "feminism." Yet, despite positive suggestions that when men recognize sexism they may be more likely to confront it, engaging with feminism inherently through engaging with the problem feminism seeks to solve, research indicates that in comparison with women, men are generally less likely to identify sexism, both on an interpersonal level and on an institutional level. Even when given the context that they are meant to note every instance of sexism, men are less likely to note when they perceive differential treatment between themselves and women peers as sexism (Swim et al. 2001), as well as less likely to identify institutional forms of gendered discrimination, such as through legal proceedings and hiring practices (Blordon, O'Brien and Kordys 2012). Thus, research indicates that not only are men less likely to

recognize sexism and the associated severity of sexist interactions, but the implication of this lack of recognition is also a lack of mobilization of allyship (Drury and Kaiser 2014).

Part of this lack of recognition of inequality could potentially be linked to the lack of politicization of men's behaviour. Holmgren and Hearn (2009) explain that due to the naturalized role of the patriarchy within current Western societies, the "genderization" of men's behaviour is not seen as inherently political. This means that engagement with behaviour or practices that may oppress other groups is not often perceived as oppressive by men due to a rationalized positionality that is reasonably attributed through realities and stipulations associated with power. Men's practices in both the public and private realms are often perceived as being simply normal, rather than a gender-conscious activity due to their alignment with dominant ideologies of power (Holmgren and Hearn 2009). Therefore, one may argue that men encounter feminism in their daily lives often without acknowledging it or their role *in* relation to the pursuit of equality, meaning they often reproduce gender inequality through social, economic and cultural relations that are aligned with dominant social norms that uphold power and privilege for men (Holmgren and Hearn 2009).

However, research also indicates that this statement may universalize the masculine experience and that different types of men may engage with feminism in different types of ways. While there may be a disconnect between the identification of gender consciousness and the behaviour of men individually, the significant steps towards gender equality in recent decades have increased men's explicitly gender-conscious activities. Some examples that may be considered sites of gender-conscious activism for men in recent decades are the gay rights movement, the development of queer politics, and new sexual movements that advocate for rights and equity for folks of diverse gender and sexual identities (Holmgren and Hearn 2009).

Other bodies of research have highlighted the potential for men who are more likely to reject oppressive beliefs and act as allies are most often men who experience unfair treatment as a result of one of their other identity markers, such as their ethnicity or sexual orientation (Drury and Kaiser 2014). This serves to reinforce the idea that when men understand the various forms that inequality may take and the intersecting nature of identities within that, they may be more willing to identify as allies. Thus, they would be more positively oriented to feminism.

Feminization of feminist men.

Related to their ability to understand inequality, existing literature points to men's relationship to hegemonic masculinity as a potential contributor to their understanding and engagement with social justice broadly, as well as backlash when men stray from hegemonic masculine norms. Hegemonic masculinity can be conceptualized as a form of masculinity that functions to not only dominate women and other marginalized identity groups but also reinforce the domination of other men by men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is thus not only theoretical but a pattern of practice, meaning that there are behaviors, beliefs, and role expectations that reinforce men's dominance over others (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Kaufman (1999) highlights this learned behavioral element, stating that "the acquisition of hegemonic (and most subordinate) masculinities is a process through which men come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion which are experienced as inconsistent with manhood" (Kaufman 1999: 65). Thus, when considering that men's social scripts are reflective of hegemonic masculinity, they often therefore include restrictive emotionality and empathy, particularly with other men, as well as a drive for control, power and competition, specifically regarding income and employment success (Davis and Wagner 2005). These social scripts determine what is the "correct" behavior

for men to employ socially in order to align with privileged norms, leading to more “successful” social interactions wherein men are able to retain their social power. Many scholars have called attention to this as a catch twenty-two that men face: on one hand having power is a helpful experience for men as they get access to increased social capital by virtue of their masculinity, on the other hand, men often feel what Kaufman (1999) describes as “pain, fear, and alienation” (59), worrying about repercussions if they do not perform their masculinity correctly. Thus, if performing masculinity correctly is synonymous with aligning with heterosexual, hegemonic norms of masculinity, engaging in feminism would represent a challenge to men’s access to power, inadvertently challenging other men’s access as well.

Related to the performance of masculinity and alignment with hegemonic norms, some men’s hesitation to engage with feminism can be linked to the potential backlash and negative stereotypes of feminist men. Opponents of men engaging in feminism have historically questioned the manhood of men engaging with feminism in the form of overtly supporting women’s rights. One famous example in 1913 was when Rep. Thomas Heflin stated that “I do not believe that there is a single red-blooded man in the world who in his heart really believes in women’s suffrage. I think every man who favors it ought to be made to wear a dress” (Kimmel 2010: 218) This quote highlights a common theme in the backlash against pro-feminist men that actively perform allyship; there is an implicit or explicit assumption that any man that supports equality for women must therefore not be a real man or even a man at all. Kimmel argues that statements such as the one made by Rep. Heflin demonstrate two important themes in the backlash faced by pro-feminist men: 1. There’s an implicit equation of manhood with oppression, meaning that real men ought to support injustice wholeheartedly, and 2. There’s an equation of supporting gender equality with femininity, meaning that only men who have

“failed” at being “real” men could ever be interested in gender equality (Kimmel, 2010). More recently, comedian Jerry Seinfeld was quoted on a podcast stating he missed “dominant masculinity”, elaborating that contemporary discourse of men and masculinity have strayed from what he deemed a stronger, hierarchical understanding of the role of men (NBC 2024). Seinfeld stated that he understood the consequences of toxic masculinity, yet doubled down that “still, I like a real man” (NBC 2024), mirroring the statement from Thomas Heflin that “real” men are dominant, strong, and potentially even toxic. Despite the one hundred and eleven-year gap between the statements from Thomas Heflin and Jerry Seinfeld, the parallels between them suggest that men who engage in behavior that challenges norms of hegemonic masculinity are still subject to ridicule from other men.

Building on the questioning of manhood, there is also a consistent theme in the backlash men might face if identifying as pro-feminist in that their sexuality becomes questioned and subordinated. When considering that by aligning with dominant social norms of masculinity men are able to retain social capital, when engaging with feminism, which stands to disrupt patriarchal social power, it is perhaps unsurprising that men who support feminism often feel they are negatively stereotyped by their peers (Anderson 2009). When exploring college students' interpretation of feminist identities, the term “feminist man” was consistently assigned fewer stereotypically masculine characteristics, thus being viewed as less heterosexual and sexually active when compared to just “man” (Anderson 2009). This is echoed in research with other men engaged in social justice activism, whereby gender egalitarian men are perceived as more effeminate and gay because of their alignment with women (Rudman et al. 2013), as well as men who confront homophobic remarks are viewed as less likely to be heterosexual, even if they have overtly stated their sexuality (Cadieux and Chasteen 2015). Particularly because this

heterosexuality is in alignment with hegemonic masculine norms, the stereotyping of men who engage with feminism and social justice as being homosexual is a powerful potential deterrent to men's allyship. If being concerned for the wellbeing of others is characterized as feminine, hegemonic masculinity is inherently misaligned with the traits associated with social justice activism and organizing on behalf of others (Davis and Wagner 2004). As Kimmel (2010) explains, "Any man who supports feminism cannot be a real man, hence he must be gay. Thus, does internalized homophobia keep men from supporting feminism" (Kimmel 2010: 218). Ultimately, when exploring the relationships between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, the negative stereotyping of men who stray from hegemonic norms may function to dissuade men from engaging in feminism as it would detract from their own social power. However, it is also worth noting that what constitutes hegemonic masculinity shifts over time (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), and thus what has deterred one generation from engaging with feminism may not deter others.

Generational location.

Much of what influences men's relationship to and with feminism can be understood by examining the relationship between their generational location and social ideologies. For example, Bettencourt et al. (2011) discuss the social location of research participants in relation to the women's movement as a possible factor influencing their beliefs. This is attributed to society having progressively become more liberal following the women's movement, therefore current generations may not have the same resistance to change as earlier generations. One of the potential reasons for this may be the accessibility of education, as young men are able to access post-secondary education more easily now than in previous generations, meaning they receive more opportunities to learn about the nature of oppression and the need for social movements

(Bettencourt et al. 2011). Indeed, there has been considerable research conducted since the early 1970s which indicates a positive shift towards more egalitarian roles for women in both the private sphere and the public sphere (Houvouras and Carter 2008). This would suggest that younger generations are being raised in a social environment which values equality and equity, meaning they would likely be socialized to be more supportive of such principles.

In a study conducted with 270 students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in the United States, students were asked to define feminism and discuss whether they identified as a feminist (Houvouras and Carter 2008). While this study did involve respondents who identified as either male or female, it provides a compelling example of how men enrolled in university demonstrate an inconsistent or negative understanding of feminism. The most common definition of feminism presented by their participants conceptualized feminism as a combination of beliefs, attitudes and actions that support the pursuit of gender equality (Houvouras and Carter 2008: 244). In terms of feminist traits, students who identified as feminists were likely to identify a feminist as an individual who is a woman and supports gender equality, whereas students who identified as non-feminists were likely to identify a feminist as someone who believes that women are superior to or strongly dislikes men, and in fact, discriminates against men (Houvouras and Carter 2008: 246). This indicates a disconnect between the perception of feminism conceptually by university students and the perception of how feminism is taken up by those involved in feminist activism, as their definitions were ambiguously positive about the role of feminism theoretically, yet negative and increasingly gendered about the uptake of the label of feminist. When considering that male respondents were much less likely to identify as feminists and more likely to associate negative stereotypes with the movement than their female counterparts, this disconnect becomes increasingly troubling.

The findings of Houvouras and Carter (2008) are echoed in other research on university students and their perceptions of feminism. For example, in research with college students in Texas, Ogletree et al (2017) found a similar gender gap in the association of positive and negative stereotypes with feminism. Specifically, men were more likely to identify feminism as being associated with “man-hating” tendencies, emphasizing that feminists were more aggressive and opinionated than non-feminists (Ogletree et al. 2017:1585). This study demonstrated that younger folks are still overwhelmingly unlikely to claim the label of feminist as less than half of their sample agreed with the statement “I consider myself a feminist” (Ogletree et al. 2017: 1585). Unsurprisingly, within that demographic men were statistically more unlikely to identify as feminists, as well as highly likely to report beliefs that corresponded with sexist attitudes towards women and benevolence and hostility towards other men (Ogletree et al. 2017:1585). These results indicate that not only are men less likely to identify as feminists, they are also more likely to harbor traditional beliefs about gender which in turn contribute to hostility between men and women, as well as men and other men. Further, this research indicates that when defining feminism from the perspective of equality for all, students were more likely to consider themselves feminist, thus mediating the disconnect between the label of “feminist” and feminist attitudes (Ogletree et al. 2017: 1586).

The disconnect in college students understanding between the label and the values of feminism is a consistent trend in qualitative research exploring the topic of feminist interpretations by cohort. In a study by Breen & Karpinski (2008), the authors explored university students' perception of both the label of feminist and the values associated with feminism. Their results mirrored the research done by Ogletree et al (2017) and Houvouras and Carter (2008) in identifying a gendered split; women were overwhelmingly more likely than men

to identify as feminists, as women reported a neutral stance on the label while men outright rejected the label (Breen and Karpinski 2008: 308). Breen and Karpinski (2008) further delineated between feminist ideologies by exploring which values men and women were more likely to identify positively with, and despite the gender gap in attitudes, both women and men were more open to feminism when framed according to a liberal interpretation (Breen and Karpinski: 308). One of the reasons that the authors stated this might be because liberal feminist beliefs have become mainstreamed in institutions such as college campuses (Breen and Karpinski 2008: 308). Due to the normalization of liberal beliefs in institutions such as universities, often liberal feminism is not viewed as feminism because the stance on equal rights through structural access has become so normalized (Liss, Hoffner and Crawford 2000).

The studies published by scholars like Houvouras and Carter (2008), Ogletree et al. (2017) and Breen and Karpinski (2008) demonstrate that within student populations, despite evidence that younger generations are more likely to identify positively with social movements, young men are still resistant to identifying positively with feminism, and resistant to claiming the label of feminist. This is concerning as research indicates that identifying positively with a social movement may increase one's likelihood to engage in social justice, thus men's lack of interest or outright rejection of feminism is a discouraging indicator of their willingness to confront injustice. However, while the above studies do indicate gender differences in positive interpretations of feminism, it is worth noting that they are all reporting on American data, and are reporting on data gathered several decades ago. In order to address this gap, the following study aims to gather data to explore how young men engage with feminism in a Canadian context in a contemporary context.

Research Questions

Existing research tends to label men universally as resistant to feminism, ultimately contributing to men's potential resistance to feminism (Herbert 2007). Despite this, recent studies have indicated that men are likely to become more supportive of feminism as generations become more aware of social inequality (Bettencourt et al. 2011). Given the plethora of significant social events in the past ten years, as feminist movements such as the "Pussyhat" women's march, #MeToo, #SayHerName and the challenges to Roe v Wade in the United States, contemporary youth are coming of age in a particularly hostile climate for gender equality. Further, this hostility is perhaps more widespread in awareness than ever, as with the advent of social media, youth are bombarded with news constantly throughout the day. In addition to greater awareness of inequality, existing research also indicates young men are less likely to identify with and engage in feminist activism than young women and folks of diverse gender identities. Thus, the following study seeks to explore how young men understand feminism as a way of exploring the potential inhibitors or contributors to their engagement. Specifically, I ask the following research question:

1. How do young men understand and engage with feminism? What factors influence this relationship?
2. How does men's relationship to feminism reflect their interpretations of norms of masculinity?

Methodology, Methods, and Data

Methodology

Researcher positionality.

Feminist theory is often concerned with the ways that power dynamics operate in all aspects of social life. One goal of feminist theory in research then is to reveal the power dynamics concealed in everyday social interactions (Hawkesworth 2006). Specifically, feminist researchers often focus on the impact of power within the research processes, exploring how power leads to differences in the production of knowledge (McHugh 2020; Albert et al., 2020). In this way, feminist theory functions as a tool to challenge notions of objectivity and expertise associated with more traditional, colonial, positivist ways of conducting research, enabling the researcher to view the knowledge of their research participants as equally valuable to their own knowledge (McHugh 2020). Power is therefore seen as a socially mediated process rather than the result of interpersonal dynamics; thus, power is implicitly woven into research and must be acknowledged and challenged through research design and processes (Unger 2021).

Particularly when considering that the goal of feminist research is to challenge hierarchies of oppression and marginalization, feminist research requires an active commitment to not duplicate power differentials in both the process of researching and the production of knowledge following research (McHugh 2020). Rather than bracket the researcher's identity and perspectives away from the research being conducted, the researcher is expected to acknowledge their situated perspective and reflect on how their life experiences and identity may influence their choice of topics, questions, and meaning-making of the data (Haraway 1988). The reflexive stance is meant to allow researchers to conduct a consistent self-reflection while conducting research, exploring “who we are and who we are in relation to those we study”

(Reinharz and Davidman 1992: 15). Thus, feminist researchers ought to remain cognizant of their power in relation to their participants and commit to applying critical reflection throughout their research to ensure their own power remains noted.

My own identity and social location shapes this study and how I approached it throughout the research process. I am a cis-gendered woman that conducted research with men about their views on feminism, a topic that continues to be stigmatized and challenging for men to discuss. One of the reasons this engagement with participants was feasible is likely because of my alignment with dominant forms of femininity and am therefore not socially constructed as deviant in my gender identity. My alignment with normative ideals of femininity is of relevance to this research as there is a possibility that men will be less comfortable expressing negative or controversial views of feminism when they are interviewed by a woman (Lefkowich 2019). If I had been a man interviewing other men, there is the possibility that these responses may have differed and led to a different outcome in the data. Lefkowich (2019) suggests that men may grapple with their gender performance in interviews with women more so than if they were interviewed by a man thus they might share different information if worried about judgement or criticism from the interviewer. However, there is also a potential that men shared their thoughts and feelings with me in great depth and detail not in spite of my gender identity, but *because* I am a woman. Similar to the results indicated in Arendell's (1997) study wherein she interviewed men about their thoughts on divorce, men remarked that they had rarely or never discussed their thoughts about feminism with another person, particularly women. Several expressed gratitude for having been provided the opportunity to share their thoughts and expressed a desire to engage with other men about the topic of feminism without fear of rejection by their peers. Thus, despite my lack of relationship with the participants outside of the interview, there is a chance that my

role as the *feminized other* (Arrendell 1997, De Beauvoir 1949) was of benefit for encouraging men to open up in interviews.

My ethnicity may also have informed various elements throughout the research process. I am a white woman, and therefore I have benefited from systems that serve to protect white supremacy. I am also of settler descent, meaning that my family and I have benefited from the colonization and genocide inflicted on the Indigenous and First Nations communities by earlier settlers. My parents are both public servants, and I have benefited from being raised in a family with dual income and access to most common middle-class benefits, such as being encouraged to apply to universities, resulting in my current graduate degree pursuits. I, therefore, feel secure existing in institutions such as universities because they have been designed in alignment with Eurocentric standards of whiteness and gender binaries, and thus I am better positioned to succeed within them than others who may be marginalized due to their ethnicity or gender identity. Consequently, I felt physically safe conducting research with men, a demographic that holds more power than I do, because I am unlikely to face violence due to my race or ethnicity because I present visually compatible with Eurocentric norms of whiteness. When considering the historical relationship between research conducted by white researchers to extract knowledge from marginalized communities, men without access to the same social capital as I have may have been dissuaded from participating in this research.

Finally, the location of my degree may have influenced the sample available, it ought to be considered in the interpretation of this research. For example, the University of Victoria where I conducted my research exists on the unceded territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, commonly also referred to as the Esquimalt and Songhees first nations. The University of Victoria where I attend and have worked on this thesis exists because of the ongoing forces of

colonization, and thus I have benefited inadvertently from the pain and marginalization inflicted on Indigenous and First Nations communities. Academia and university campuses are understood as institutions built on systematic exclusion and extraction of knowledge from other marginalized communities. Therefore, my decision to situate interviews on a University campus because it is a location that I deemed secure, reflects my privilege and may have dissuaded men who do not share the same social capital as I do, such as racialized or Indigenous men.

Therefore, this must be considered in the data because had the study been conducted at another location or offered further opportunities to do in-person interviews off campus, the sample may have had greater variation and thus the data may have also had greater diversity in response.

Feminist theories in qualitative research.

Given the nature of the questions explored in this research, feminist theory was a natural place to draw inspiration and best practices for conducting the following qualitative study. Feminist research cannot be specified as any single approach to the creation of knowledge or any substantive position, but feminist researchers tend to share various common perspectives on best practices in research (McHugh 2020). As a starting principle, feminist research applies an anti-sexist approach to knowledge generation, meaning that research is meant to challenge stereotypes and bias in gender roles (McHugh 2020). This challenge of stereotypes and bias is often further reflected in the belief that feminist research is meant to work to actively benefit the advancement of women and other marginalized identities within the patriarchy (Mchugh 2020). According to Letherby (2003), feminist researchers have a political commitment to produce knowledge that makes a difference through social and individual change, thus meaning that feminist research is not necessarily always research about women but it is research to be used in the transformation of a sexist society into a more equitable one (Mchugh 2020; Letherby 2003;

Cook and Fonow 2005). Other core principles of feminist research include a commitment “to struggle against coercive hierarchies linked to gender (and other statuses); to revolt against practices, values and knowledge systems that subordinate and denigrate women; and to promote women’s freedom and empowerment” (Hawkesworth 2006: 7). Thus, feminist research suggests that there are ways forward to a better world through exposing and remedying gender inequities and leveraging critical scholarship to inspire social change (McHugh 2020). Feminist research is therefore not viewed as a standalone static entity, but rather as a transformative practice focused on altering the social world in more equitable ways (McHugh 2020).

In terms of research design, feminist research methods are most often found within qualitative methodologies (Harding 2018), but not always (see for example, McCall 2005). Feminist research is grounded in the following: the dismantling of oppression, a focus on the subjective and personal within research, emphasizing a reflexive understanding of gender asymmetry and oppression, and the ability for research to be conducted both ethically and mobilized to empower and create social change (Harding 2018). As argued by Donna Haraway (1988), feminist qualitative research begins with the understanding that knowledge is always situated in the bodies and lives of people, specifically women and other historically marginalized groups. From that perspective, knowledge is always located and situated within specific contexts, and therefore there are no “objective” truths. Rather, there are truths that are relevant to the actors within the contexts in which the knowledge produced is situated, thus context is always relevant in establishing knowledge generated within research to connect situations to people, and vice versa (Haraway 1988).

In this research, feminist theory functions as a framework to situate the findings within the specific social, cultural, political, and historic moment in which this research was conducted.

The findings of this research are not meant to be read as universal truths, as the cohort of men interviewed are not a representative sample, nor is the scope of the study large enough to extrapolate to any overarching demographic. Rather, the themes present in this study are meant to begin to address a gap in the research exploring how a specific group of young men enrolled in University may feel about feminism, and how their feelings may impact their engagement with feminism.

Intersectionality as a paradigm for exploring difference within categories.

A theory that has gained significant traction in feminist research in recent decades is that of intersectionality although the ideas of intersectionality have been conceptually relevant and used for centuries. To name only a few, Hill-Collins's (1990) for example, introduced the idea of the matrix of oppression; Sojourner Truth famously discussed the ideas in her 1851 speech, and Anna Julia Cooper (1982) discussed how black women face unique challenges and struggles because of racism and sexism in her collection of essays *Voices from the South*. Contemporarily, intersectionality, as a word and concept, was initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and used to confront the use of single axis of identity in legal doctrines and antiracist policies. Moreover, Crenshaw used it as a way to critique the ways that intersections of race and gender create difference in categories of experience and oppression. Specifically, Crenshaw offered intersectionality as a metaphor to explore the ways that black women might experience different types of structural and interpersonal violence through the intersections of their race and gender, and the ways that this violence is woven into institutions like the legal system (Crenshaw 1989).

Intersectionality has been taken up and used in a variety of ways. Some scholars may consider using intersectionality to explore how the experience of individuals intersect with various social constructs, such as race, class and gender, and how these intersections inform and

position individuals within a given society. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins called for intersectionality to be used as an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization” (Hill Collins 2000, Accessed via Hancock 2013). Crenshaw proposed various levels within intersectionality, differentiating between structural intersectionality (the ways that the location of women of color experience violence in a way that is qualitatively different than white women by virtue of the intersection of their gender and race), and political intersectionality (the way that feminist and antiracist policies have collectively marginalized issues of violence against women of color) (Crenshaw 1989; Yuval- Davis 2006). Thus, intersectionality can be used as a tool to explore the ways that power and institutions inform individual experiences of difference, and vice versa in the ways that individuals reproduce and reinforce this difference.

Worthy of note, both Hill Collins and Williams Crenshaw are Black academics, and their application of intersectionality focused specifically on the multiple layering’s of oppression that Black women faced in the United States. As intersectionality has gained popularity in the social sciences, scholars have raised concerns that intersectionality ought not be divorced from its origins by erasing the contributions of Black women in academia by applying intersectionality as a metaphor to all qualitative research (Hancock 2013; Yuval- Davis 2006; Alexander- Floyd 2022). Additionally, intersectionality as it was initially proposed was meant as a tool specifically to further highlight the ways that racism and sexism merged to oppress black women, and therefore it is not necessarily appropriate when conceptualized in its original offering in research with privileged groups, such as white men. Other scholars have critiqued the application of intersectionality in research as a “buzzword,” whereby it is applied without necessary clarification about the different analytical levels which its exploring (Yuval- Davis 2006).

Without doing so, scholars risk reducing intersectionality to an additive model that simplifies oppression, further limiting analyses by homogenizing culture and structures (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Hancock (2013) proposes an empirical paradigm of intersectionality, wherein intersectionality functions as a “justice oriented analytical framework for examining persistent sociopolitical problems that emerge from race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other sociopolitical fissures as interlocking, process-driven categories of difference” (282). When applying intersectionality in this manner, one can explore the potential that multiple causal paths can potentially lead to a similar outcome, accessing a visioning process that encapsulates current obstacles while still honoring the theoretical integrity of intersectionality as proposed by Crenshaw (Hancock 2013: 282). In this study, intersectionality therefore functions as a paradigm to explore the persistent problem of gender inequality and the ways that men may reproduce or challenge narratives of difference in their perceptions of feminism, honoring the roots of the theory without reproducing the erasure of black women in the Academy.

Hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form of masculine gender roles.

Another concept that guides the analysis conducted in this research is hegemonic masculinity. This section draws heavily on the work of R.W. Connell, as she introduced the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a framework for understanding the existence of multiple masculinities within male dominated societies (Connell 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is rooted in Gramsci’s concept of Hegemony, meaning that it is a position of dominance that is maintained through consensus rather than physical force (Jewkes et al. 2015). This consensus is maintained not only by those who benefit from the social default of masculinity, but also those that are marginalized by patriarchy, such as women and others of diverse gender identities. The social

construction of masculinity as the default in patriarchal societies resultantly functions to normalize male dominance and uphold social norms, meaning that hegemonic masculinity reinforces masculine presentations most in alignment with power. To quote Connell and Messerschmidt (2005),

“hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77).

Initially, Connell put forth a model of masculinity that reflects “traditional” characteristics, such as aggression, dominance, and lack of emotional response (1987). This embodiment of masculinity is protected and enacted through a series of norms and practices that establish a subject position, meaning that hegemonic masculinity is not a static identity, and rather a series of actions that can be taken to reinforce men’s desired image in the social world (Wetherell and Edley 1999). Additionally, despite the initial introduction of a ‘traditional’ masculinity as the dominant form, Connell and others have also noted that due to the required relationship between social construction of gender and gender politics, hegemonic masculinity can shift over time to reflect contemporary trends in the social world (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Of note within Connell’s (1987, 2005) model of hegemonic masculinity is the recognition that there is no monolithic ‘masculinity’, rather, there are multiple masculinities that are also subordinate and constructed in relation to hegemonic masculinity. It is thus relevant to focus on the relationships between masculinities and social structures, as within hegemonic masculinity frameworks it is possible to see how the internalization of gender roles functions to reinforce a social structure that legitimates distinct masculinities within a patriarchal structure. For example, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) offer the example of gay masculinity as a subordinated

masculinity that functions to reinforce hegemonic masculine norms. Through the circulation of stereotypes that gay men are effeminate, emotional, and weak, gay masculinity becomes more linked to femininity and womanhood, and thus reinforces hegemonic masculinity as the dominant masculine form. If considering that heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity are intertwined, any masculinity that strays from this model is thus less valued and stigmatized as less masculine, constantly functioning in comparison to hegemonic masculinity as the default social norm for men. Resultantly, hegemonic masculinity functions to not only subordinate women and those outside of the gender class of “men”, but also other men (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The potential for hegemonic masculinities to shift to reflect new cultural beliefs while continuing to subordinate other masculinities is crucial in research considering men’s understanding of the social world. In research exploring men’s perspectives of parenting, data has indicated that hegemonic structure is changing from traditional conceptualizations of aggression, to now include various elements of orientation to care work, and interest in gender equality (Hearn et al. 2012). In research exploring military embodiments of hegemonic masculinity, research has indicated a shift from traditional domineering and aggressive masculinities to “tough and tender” soldiers, thus indicating a transference of power from historic forms of masculinity to a new cultural pattern while still retaining power within masculine embodiment (Duncanson 2015). Relatedly, there have been researchers that highlight complicit masculinities, describing men who do not achieve hegemonic masculinity yet still experience power and prestige from supporting hegemonic norms, reinforcing the subordination of other types of masculinities, such as gay masculinity (Månsdotter et al. 2009). Thus, data indicates that not only are hegemonic norms still relevant, they are also shifting from more overt

forms of aggression and domination to more subtle embodiments, ensuring the retention of power within masculine entities.

Despite critiques of ambiguity, hegemonic masculinity provides a helpful opportunity to distinguish nuance within the category of “men”. Hegemonic masculinities can be constructed in ways that do not apply directly to the lives of all men, yet the concept is present in the practices, attitudes, and biases that men take up to justify their behaviour to themselves and others (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Considering that previous research has indicated that men who engage in feminism are stereotyped as effeminate and thus subordinated within hegemonic frameworks, the concept of hegemonic masculinity functions as an analytic tool to explore men’s responses in this study. Additionally, as men’s actions intentionally or unintentionally reproduce gender inequality through their social, economic, and cultural relations, this inequality becomes normalized as accepted behavior, and thus it is not understood by men to be “gendered” behavior (Holmgren and Hearn 2009). Resultantly, whether men acknowledge their alignment with hegemonic masculinity or not, the concept is relevant to analyzing their interpretations of masculinity and their opportunity to engage in practices that challenge hegemonic norms, such as engaging in social justice and care for others.

Methods

This study used a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews to research the ways that young men might engage with feminism (Creswell and Miller 1997). Leveraging a qualitative approach enables the exploration of how participants construct meaning or make sense of their experiences in the social world (Cresswell and Miller 1997), as well as aligns with feminist research approaches (McHugh 2020). As qualitative researchers typically study phenomena and processes situated within their natural contexts (such as a university campus), this approach was

appropriate given the interest in young men's opinions specifically (Hallberg 2006). Further, within a qualitative research perspective, the researcher must remain connected to the narrative, engaging with reflexivity and self-location through the process as an essential component of meaning-making (Cresswell and Miller 1997). Thus, at every stage of the research process, I attempted to remain aware of my identity and experiences in determining my understanding of the data, reflecting on my positionality during data collection, analysis, interpretation, and summary. Particularly when considering my identity as a woman conducting research with men, I was consciously aware of the intersections of power dynamics between myself and the research participants throughout the study.

Sampling & Recruitment.

Participants from this research were recruited at the University of Victoria through a variety of strategies. Recruitment occurred through a convenience or opportunistic sampling technique and the use of a recruitment poster (See Appendix A). Convenience sampling techniques involve using an open period of recruitment that continues until a defined series of objectives are met, such as a number of subjects, events, or institutions enrolled in the study (Luborsky and Rubinstein 1995). Selection of participants is therefore based on a first-come, first-served approach, and is often linked to studies drawing on predefined populations (Luborsky and Rubinstein 1995). To be eligible to participate in this research, participants needed to identify as a man, be between the ages of 18-26, and be enrolled at the University of Victoria. Recruitment posters were shared throughout the Sociology department at the University of Victoria, distributing posters on campus in common spaces, and asking friends and other connections to circulate my recruitment poster to their networks on social media. This strategy helped to start

the recruitment process, and then naturally lent itself to snowball sampling after a few participants had been interviewed.

According to Noy (2008), snowball sampling and in-depth interview approaches are mutually compatible as respondent-driven sampling helps to shape the interview interaction. In this way, participants exert a substantial influence on how the research develops, how research interacts with existing social dynamics, and consequently how additional knowledge can be developed (Noy 2008). In this way, knowledge is both researched and produced through snowball sampling, contributing to a more dynamic process of recruitment (Noy 2008). As I was aware of the opportunity for men to be encouraged to discuss their experiences with me by other men's sharing of positive experiences, snowball sampling was well suited to the methodology of this research project. Thus, following initial recruitment through distributing a poster and conducting interviews, participants referred their friends and colleagues that fit the criteria of the research study, and I concluded the recruitment at 13 participants.

Demographics and incentives.

Of the 13 men that participated in this study, eight (61%) identified as white, while the other five (39%) identified as racialized. Three (23%) of the participants were enrolled in graduate level programs at the time of our interview, while the remaining ten (76.9%) were enrolled in undergraduate level programs at the time of interviews. In terms of sexuality, only two men (15%) identified as bisexual, while the remaining 11 (84%) men identified as heterosexual.

For several reasons, the demographics of the participant sample will not be explored in depth past this brief summary. One reason is that the participants offered details about their background briefly at the beginning of the interviews when asked to describe themselves, but did not discuss their identity in relation to feminism in our conversations. As a result, while this

information contextualizes the sample of participants, it would not be reasonable to use to conduct a more intersectional analysis. Additionally, a significant portion of the participants were referred to the study by their friends or peers through snowball recruitment, and thus including a further breakdown of their identities in relation to their acronyms would risk breaching anonymity. Therefore, participants will only be reference by their assigned pseudonym in the findings and discussion of this study.

In addition to snowball recruitment, I also compensated participants for their time as a means of recruiting men to the study. Existing research has found that the use of incentives, with ethics board approval, can facilitate recruitment at a higher speed than if not using incentives (Kelly et al. 2017). Specifically, leveraging monetary incentives can help to motivate individuals to engage in research (Kelly et al. 2017). In addition to being a core component of feminist methods which assert that all knowledge and time are valuable, destabilizing traditional power dynamics between the researcher and research participant. I decided to compensate participants with a small honorarium of \$15 gift cards to their choice of online store, in recognition of their knowledge and contribution to my master's research project.

Interviews and Data Collection

The data for this project were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants who identified as men enrolled at the University of Victoria and were between the ages of 18-26. Conducting interviews was an effective way of obtaining data that was specific to the topic of men's perceptions and engagement with feminism, specifically because interviews allow for the opportunity to generate data exploring not only the topic at hand but also how individuals make meaning (Creswell and Miller 1997). The interview setting enables the researcher to pose follow-up questions, allowing for information to be clarified, further contributing to the exploration of

contributing factors determining participants' responses (Gaskell and Bauer 2000). In the context of this research study, given the subjective nature of individuals' relationships and interpretations of feminism, interviews offered a valuable path to explore the diverse understandings and enactments of concepts associated with feminism.

In order to incorporate some of the core values associated with feminist methodologies in research, Harding (2018) suggests that researchers remain aware of the unspoken data, note the silences and explore further through careful probing of research participants (Harding 2018). Thus, while conducting interviews and analyzing data I took great care to consider the differences in power which research participants may embody, such as different class, race and ethnicity backgrounds, as well as took care to be cognizant of power and class differentials between me and the research participants (Harding 2018). Harding establishes that this may be most easily accomplished through interviews wherein two people participate in the conversation to share understanding and attempt to minimize power disparities, making it slightly less formal than traditional interview methods (Harding 2018). I was therefore conscious of this need to ensure that interviews aligned with more conversational formats in order to disrupt power dynamics, and structured my interviews to support building rapport between myself and participants.

Particularly because I am a woman conducting research with men, a demographic of the population with a different lived experience than I have, I was consistently aware of the dynamics of “Listening” and “Writing” as described by Devault (1990). As language is always thought to be reflective of political underpinnings, I tried to remain cognizant of my identity and experiences in interpreting the data and the language that I used to assign themes to the data. Devault argues that because language is constructed to align with masculine norms (hegemonic

masculine norms), there are experiences that are lost in everyday conversation without translation to properly describe the experience (Devault 1990:102). This “translating” process as described is thus meant to provide “clues” to experiences, enabling the researcher to fill in the gaps in information to help understand the unsaid things (Devault 1990:102). Thus the incorporation of cues such as noting when participants laugh, noting their body language, and making note of other such symbols in order to explore elements of ambiguity in the data collection and analysis processes (Devault 1990:103). I remained cognizant of this during all interviews, keeping note of when participants would share something outside of the realm of the question, or noting discomfort in the form of silence or awkward laughter that caught participants by surprise.

The interviews were semi-structured, a list of questions was designed and followed in each interview, but follow-up questions could be asked after the initial question in order to clarify participants' responses and gather further data. This is aligned with the guidelines put for by Bechhofer and Paterson (2000), who argue that semi-structured interviews are thus an accessible format for individuals who may be less practiced at interviewing. Leveraging a semi-structured interview approach also enabled further flexibility than a standardized interview, which allows the interviewer to align their questions with the subjects' positioning (Berg 2001). For example, when interviewing someone who is adamantly anti-feminist, interview questions needed to be framed differently to encourage open dialogue in comparison with overly pro-feminist participants.

Participants were interviewed by the primary researcher either over the online video conferencing platform Zoom or in person in a private room at the University of Victoria. The interviews for this project took place at a time that was convenient for participants. I began each

interview by introducing myself, doing a light review of the research project, checking if the participants had any questions before starting, reviewing informed consent, and then once the participants indicated they were comfortable we began the interview. Audio, consent forms, and other data files for this project were stored on my personal password-protected computer and in the University of Victoria's private secure storage folder. Only I have access to this data and I am the only one who knows the identities of the participants in this study.

Data analysis.

Qualitative research is understood as encompassing various approaches to data analysis, such as grounded theory, narrative analysis, and the approach that I applied which is a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is broadly conceptualized as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). There is no clear agreement about the steps involved in thematic analysis, as some studies may require different approaches depending on the theoretical underpinning of the research (Braun and Clarke 2006: 80).

In order to allow the participant's perspectives to drive the outcome of this research, an inductive approach was taken to developing themes. An inductive approach to thematic analysis refers to when themes are strongly linked to the data, thus themes may encompass more diverse thought patterns than simply the questions asked in the interview guide (Braun and Clarke 2006). Inductive coding is meant to allow the data to determine themes without trying to fit into a pre-existing codebook, therefore my themes emerged from participants' data and the codes were developed and evolved as I continued analyzing the data. Particularly because my research questions are so broad and this research attempts to define from a base level (not providing themes to respond to, rather asking "how do you define feminism"), this approach enabled me to

sit with the data and explore themes within the data without attempting to make the data “fit” preconceived notions of men’s understanding.

The data collected was analyzed from both a semantic and a latent level. Despite the tendency to conceptualize thematic analysis as existing within one of the two categories, I analyzed the data from both levels in order to retain the context and situated knowledge found within participants' responses. The data was analyzed at a semantic level, first describing trends in the data collected during interviews, and then interpreted to establish broader meanings and implications of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Patton 1990). In my research I first explored the direct data provided by men, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) of familiarizing myself with the data collected through transcription and rereading, then generating initial codes. Following this, I collected codes into potential themes, generating a thematic map of analysis wherein some codes were used to reinforce others. Finally, I named the themes and then began conducting a latent-level analysis, exploring the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations that inform the semantic contents of the data collected (Braun and Clarke 2006). After I was satisfied with the analysis, I wrote the findings into a report in the form of this Master’s thesis.

To ensure that my analysis corresponded with feminist approaches to research, the topic of reflexivity was top of mind at all time while exploring the data. As noted above, language is often thought of as being “man-made,” however this blurs the potential for nuance in the category of “man.” In order to ensure that I was not reproducing power dynamics and remaining aware of my positionality in the research, I was consciously aware of the labels attached to the data I was analyzing (Devault 1990), choosing the language carefully in order to not reproduce reductive binaries of solely “pro-feminist” and “anti-feminist” perspective of feminism.

Specifically, when considering my positionality as a woman doing this research, I was cognizant of the ways that men may distance themselves from their responses when uncomfortable, being careful not to misinterpret ambiguity in a detrimental perspective solely because the data collected was vague (Lefkowich 2019). Incoherence and contradiction can be conceptualized as examples of men's resistance to hegemonic masculinity and Western norms of self-expression, while also considering that men's difficulty in articulating feelings about or interpreting masculinity can also be an important area to explore contemporary consensus about what it means to be a man (Lefkowich 2019). Particularly because this research explored men's understanding of feminism, a concept that inherently challenges traditional norms of gender and male privilege, I attempted to remain aware during the analysis of data that these dynamics informed how men responded to interview questions, holding space for multiple, contradictory, and nuanced responses in the data (Lefkowich 2019).

Ethical considerations.

As this research involves interviewing live human subjects, I obtained ethics approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board prior to contacting participants. This project was approved as minimal risk (see Appendix B), as the research board felt that no population with potential risk would be likely to be harmed. However, in alignment with the ethics board, I did take care to ensure that all interviews had various precautions aligned with them in order to reduce the potential of emotional or psychological distress of participants. Participants were provided with the consent form (see Appendix C) after indicating interest in the study, allowing them to review pertinent information such as sample questions to provide informed consent, and were obtained by the primary researcher before each interview. Other precautions included reminding participants they did not need to answer any questions

they did not want to, as well as reminding them that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I also provided participants with a list of resources they could find on campus should they find they experience mental health distress during or after the interview, as well as provided participants with the option to take a break during the interview if they desired to. Participants were also assured that if they decided to withdraw from the study, their data would be deleted and would not be used without their permission. Finally, confidentiality was enforced by assigning participants pseudonyms in the final paper and removing identifiable characteristics. However, this confidentiality is potentially limited as through recruiting by way of snowball sampling, some of the participants were aware of the identities of other participants.

The risks and benefits of participating in this project were outlined clearly in the consent form, and I obtained written consent from all participants before commencing the interview. During the interviews I tried to be aware of the participants' emotional state, taking care to offer encouragement to take their time or offering additional breaks if they wanted to step away from the interview momentarily. The benefits of this study for participants might include talking about a topic they are often not allowed to explore, as research notes that men often feel discomfort discussing feminism. Potential benefits to society from this research might include a more nuanced understanding of some of the factors encouraging or inhibiting men from engaging with feminism, offering educators, policymakers, and the public generally more information to leverage in inspiring men to engage in collective activism. Another potential benefit to society is the establishment of a snapshot of men's understanding of feminism in a specific context at a specific point in time, which may be helpful for further longitudinal studies on men's engagement with feminism.

Findings

This research seeks to explore how 13 young men understand and engage with feminism, as well as how their relationship with feminism is connected to their interpretations of normative masculinity. Split into three sections, this chapter seeks to answer these lines of inquiry. The first section provides an overview of the most common themes in how participants identified feminism, highlighting common definitions or elements that men associated with feminism. The second section details the role of socialization in informing men's understanding of feminism, highlighting the common themes in men's responses wherein men highlighted the impact of media, family, and partners on their initial and ongoing perception of feminism. The third section presents themes discussed in interviews that touch on the relationship between men, masculinity, and feminism. This section highlights the relational element between the perception of feminism and men's perception of dominant social norms of masculinity.

Section 1: What Is Feminism?

In this section, I explore how men both defined and identified with their definitions of feminism. Across all interviews, even if it seemed that participants were hesitant to voice their opinions, they were able to describe moments or traits they associated with feminism or with feminists themselves. Some descriptions were positive in the sense that participants detailed their support and acceptance of the feminist movement, and some were more negative in that these statements were accompanied by a tone of disdain or overt distaste for the feminist movement. However, across both positive and negative interpretations of feminism, common themes emerged in how participants frame feminism and folks they perceive as engaging in feminist activism.

Women fighting for their own equality.

Across all the interviews, participants described feminism in a way that aligned with academic understandings of feminism — namely, that it is a combination of multiple ideologies, praxis, and made up of social movements. When discussing these elements of feminism, participants often linked feminism to gender equality in terms of ideology, as well as more explicit discussion of feminism as a movement, such as through discussion of the suffragette movement. A common feature in their responses was that participants discussed the role of women concerning feminism. Most commonly, when asked “If I say the word feminism, what comes to mind for you?”, participants responded with various summaries of the same image: women fighting for their liberation. For example, Ryan thought of feminism as “advocacy for the state and experience of womanhood,” emerging as “[a] response to societal injustice [experienced by women]”. In his response, Ryan highlights the role of feminism as a path to addressing injustice, and according to his interpretation, one most commonly explored by women on behalf of other women.

Ryan’s perspective was common with other participants as well. Benjamin, for example, shared that his interpretation of feminism was “about females being equal to males, or being represented that way in society,” reflecting common themes emphasizing the role of feminism as a concept that not only presents women and men equally, but also one that is meant to trigger social change that reflects this values shift. Other participants echoed this, such as Robert, who stated that a feminist, and feminism broadly, can be understood as “somebody who wants equality between both genders and wants them to have the same rights, same responsibilities, all the same amenities in society provided for them to the same level,” demonstrating consistency in the interpretation of both the value of feminism in terms of equality ideologically between men

and women, but also the outcome of feminism as greater equality in terms of access to opportunity or resources.

Other interviews also reflected the perspective that feminism is a practice of advocacy that will ultimately lead to liberation from oppression for women. Elijah shared that he understood feminism as “Women coming forward and speaking out a lot more because from what I’ve learned in history and stuff they weren’t able to. So, feminism is a chance for them to speak out.” This sentiment demonstrates a perception of feminism as an opportunity for women to engage in self-advocacy, which is otherwise unavailable socially. Other participants, such as William, also highlight an interpretation of historical conflict in their definition of feminism. William stated that when thinking about feminism, what easily comes to mind is “the conflict between women and power structure[s] that men have created.” Here, William highlights the role of women as the core participants in feminism and feminist movements, even when acknowledging the role of men as having created the adversary to women’s feminism. Others, such as David, also reinforced the perspective that men have contributed to social issues, emphasizing the demographic of feminists as “mostly women, and my mind also jumps to I don’t know if men are encouraged to participate or not.” From this perspective, not only is feminism seen as a movement comprised of women which does not seek to involve men, but also a movement addressing men’s oppression of women.

Acceptance of past waves of feminism.

Alongside the reflection of feminism as being predominantly linked to women, participants also commonly discussed the perception that the goals and focus of feminism had shifted over time, often to the detriment of men. Commonly, participants were easily able to identify historic trends in feminism, such as earlier waves of feminist activism and their associated goals. Moreover,

most participants did generally know that newer waves of feminism present different goals and evoke different emotional responses. When asked to elaborate, interview participants stated that while there is inherent value to feminism when relating to equality, they felt there was a negative shift in the rhetoric of contemporary feminist activism. Descriptions of this shift were often coupled with a positive framing of more historic issues addressed by feminism. For example, Ryan told me:

Two things come to mind, I see the suffrage movement, and the Iranian women's rights movement right now...On the other side of that, like the sort of classical SJW [social justice warriors], sort of anti-masculine, anti-man, sort of progressive but in reality regressive and repressive movement associated with social justice in the 2000's.

Common across all interviews, participants were readily able to discuss positively the history of the North American feminist movement. Additionally, participants often stated their appreciation of structural changes that have come about from feminist movements, such as women gaining the right to vote as a result of the suffragette movement, or the increase in access to birth control that is associated with the sexual liberation advocacy of the second wave. Robert expressed:

Making birth control free and available, why did we have condoms available to us at every corner but not birth control? And just giving the same level of rights, responsibilities and equality to both genders. I think that's what I align with.

The support for birth control as a feminist issue was also echoed in other interviews. Nathan offered one such example when he stated: "I mean, I support the voting rights. Birth control is fine," emphasizing his support and approval of various goals of past feminist waves. Similarly, David expressed his support for various elements of feminism, sharing that:

I'm super down on the consent thing. I think that's awesome and great because it means that people can have great sex. That's brilliant. Also in terms of the transparency for wages and discrimination in the workplace. Also super fun and great.

Men's descriptions and understandings of feminism consistently contained descriptions of the goals of past waves of feminism, such as the fight for the right to vote in the first wave. In doing so, they also created a binary of feminism in their responses. On the one side, they expressed positive attitudes towards past waves of feminism, while on the other side, expressed discomfort or distaste for more contemporary feminist organizing. While they seemed approving of past efforts and what women fought for, they seemed almost annoyed or disapproving of contemporary efforts and goals of "social justice warriors."

Modern feminism as exclusionary to men.

As shown in the examples above, participants tended to express acceptance of historic elements and goals of feminism but also had a general criticism of contemporary feminism. One major criticism of contemporary feminism that they expressed was their sense that modern feminism was more exclusionary towards men than earlier waves were. When this was expressed, participants described how they felt that historic waves of feminism had been more focused on equality, whereas contemporary feminism which had moved towards dominance over men. At times men emphasized this using language such as "gone too far" to describe modern feminist movements' goals, often detailing their distaste for the manner in which contemporary feminist movements communicate their goals. As Andrew expressed:

In my opinion, there was one that was less about equal rights and equal everything or fairness and more about being on top. Like being a priority? It was aggressive and didn't seem like its goal was equality. And it wasn't what I thought of about feminism, kind of more about dominance.

Similarly, Nathan expressed that his relationship to feminism had changed dramatically as an adult. From adolescence to adulthood, Nathan felt that his understanding of feminism had shifted in reflection of shifts in contemporary feminist rhetoric. He lamented that:

When I was a kid I used to think of myself as a feminist when I first heard the word. But I don't think I would consider myself one now because I don't feel like the modern version is the same goal post as it used to be when it was about equality between the sexes.

While the above quotes touch on this abstractly, other participants were much more explicit in their perspective that modern feminist movements now focused on “anti-masculine rhetoric.” For example, Ryan shared that despite not wanting to assign value to different waves, the contemporary wave of feminism was uniquely hostile towards men:

I want to be mindful not to define old feminism as good feminism and modern feminism as bad feminism or fake feminism because obviously there are efficacious and non-efficacious actors in both those timelines. What I see in modern feminism is a greater leaning towards the anti-masculine or anti-male sentiment of the patriarchy being this thing that all men are complicit in, that there aren't these deep biological and physiological differences between men and women.

The sense that contemporary feminism is “anti-masculine” is also framed as the idea that feminism now perpetuates discrimination against men. To frame these statements, participants commonly emphasized their support of feminism but resented what was framed in several interviews as “reverse discrimination” against men. David shared that he felt reverse discrimination was present in workplaces specifically, wherein women were now calling to “gaslight, gatekeep, girl boss.” In his view, this is a feminist call to action that empowered women at the cost of disempowering men, stating that being “disrespectful doesn't solve the problem.” This identification of contemporary feminism as advocating for the disrespect of men was echoed in other interviews as well. Participants outlined not only the sense that feminist

rhetoric had shifted from respectful to advocating for discrimination against men, but that it had also shifted to advocate for outright violence against men. For example, Nathan expressed:

The first thing that comes to mind would be a lot of very loud, belligerent protestors. Who most often, if they disagree with some other counter-protester, they seem a lot more angry in showing what they believe in. The actions themselves, most of the time what I've seen are very angry, bordering on violent interactions between them and people they disagree with.

Robert shared a similar sentiment, sharing with me:

I don't think there's anything other than the modern feminism thing where they're going to the extreme side of "screw men, kill them all, we don't need them blah blah blah." Other than that, I don't think there's anything I don't align with.

Whether through discussion of violence, subversion of power dynamics, or just general perception that feminism had shifted from earlier waves, men consistently expressed a sense that modern feminism represented a change in feminist activism. Most commonly, this was reflected with a sense of disdain and an unwillingness to engage with their current perception of feminism, while reflecting an appreciation for previous waves of feminism as being more inclusive for men.

Section II: Arriving at Perceptions of Feminism

The section above reveals that men hold and carry with them an awareness of former waves of feminism, a general understanding of the goals of some of these waves, and that the participants have strong views about contemporary feminist action. In this section, I explore different factors that shape men's perceptions of feminism. In other words, how men feel they've arrived at these views and understandings. Interviews reveal that socializing agents and factors, such as the media, family, and partners, work to shape men's understandings of feminism. For example, when describing where he thinks his views of feminism came from, Noah shared:

I think it's socialization -- how you've been brought up, who you're around, and what kind of values would determine how likely you are to be a feminist. Of course, not 100%, but definitely significant.

The most common forms of socialization discussed in interviews were the role of media, formal education in terms of secondary and post-secondary education, and the proximity to women in their lives as foundational influences on their understanding of feminism. As Robert summarized succinctly, the origin of his understanding and awareness of feminism could be traced to “history and social studies classes and then also female friends around [them], and also social media.” Here, Robert’s initial knowledge of feminism in general came from schooling, and more recently from friends and media. Given how common these factors were expressed across the participants, I explore each factor below.

Media as a magnifier of feminist rhetoric

After defining feminism, participants were asked to elaborate on what influenced their perception of feminism, and whether their perspectives were linked to any specific moment in their lives. Time and again, media was identified in participants’ responses as a key factor in shaping these men’s views of feminism. Many participants responded with a variation of what Robert stated when he identified social media as a platform for feminist visibility and messaging, sharing that “I’ve seen them [feminist protests] on social media around other places in Canada and around the world.” Similarly, Nathan expressed that when responding to the word “feminism”, he initially thought of “a lot of protests and stuff like that, but you see going on in the news.” Interestingly, Andrew shared that his first introduction to feminism was via the media, but also through his father: “Probably my dad responding to a headline [in the news].” Here, awareness of feminist issues is framed through the media, but via his father during a household conversation. Other participants echoed this, saying that when reflecting on where

they developed their perception of feminism, they thought of consistently demonstrating the role of media and news outlets as prominent socializing factors.

While media was frequently highlighted in interviews as one of the influencing factors determining men's understanding of feminism, it was also the one most frequently delineated as negatively influencing men's perception of feminism. For example, Michael expressed that his initial instinct when describing feminism was not an optimistic one, sharing that "So initially, and I think this is just based on media, I get a bit of a, not negative, but not an overly positive [image of feminism]." This was echoed in other interviews, as when detailing the role of media, men commonly shared the sense that media swayed their understanding of feminism negatively. Specifically, participants shared that what they understood as angry, extremist, or violent factions as feminist groups emerging from media coverage of feminist movements. Eric expressed this sentiment when he said:

Being young and growing up with social media, it's really easy for voices to get amplified as voices of hate and for putting stuff down. And I think that especially with young guys, there's that push to label feminism as something that is trying to take away male rights.

Despite his awareness that these groups were being amplified, Eric still identified their messaging as something that would be internalized by young men as violent and anti-male. Similarly, Robert also shared how social media amplified messaging that feminism was exclusionary and violent towards men, sharing that "all these groups of women going around in person and on blogs and social media being like "kill men, we hate men." Time after time, men not only identified media as a source for learning about feminism, but specifically a source for learning that feminism was exclusionary towards men.

Not only were participants aware that their perspectives originated from media, they were also aware of the potential for media to distort feminism. For example, Eric, who previously

stated that he sees feminism framed as anti-male on social media, also expressed that “In reality, it isn’t feminism. What we view on social media is what gets amplified because it’s the most extreme and that’s what gets views.” Here, Eric is aware that social media often misrepresents reality, recognizing the potential to only be fed content reflecting the most “extreme” instances in order to grab the attention of viewers. Similarly, Michael shared that he recognized his initial response to feminism as informed by media, but also recognized this as a misinformed perspective.

Based on media, angry, very loud, proud to be things like that...I think it’s one of those things where I have a no-brain reaction to the word, and then my thought-out reaction to the word is two completely different things [wherein the second is positive]. It’s the result of socialization that gets so baked into you that you don’t even realize when it pops up and you’re [like] do I actually feel that way?

In this quote, Michael is perfectly reflecting the challenges that other participants alluded to in our conversations. Consistently, participants would identify social media as a determining factor in their understanding of feminism, while also acknowledging the ways that this has distorted their “real” perspective.

The role of education.

Education was commonly discussed as a transformative factor in men's understanding of feminism. The role of high school education as the initial introduction to feminism was stated across interviews, with some men sharing the importance of teachers as role models and educators for learning about historical waves of feminism and learning about the continued importance of feminism in endeavors such as consent and reducing discrimination. Lucas shared that he learned about feminism through his education, stating that it was deeply linked to equality and social justice historically:

Just history class. As a kid growing up you don't know anything, history existed but it's realizing when females got a vote in Canada. And in modern society, you would never realize that we aren't equal. So learning that in grade 9, realizing that historically there wasn't equality because everyone is equal now, that would be how I learned about it.

Other participants shared that they learned of feminism through curriculums emphasizing the body in social contexts, such as sexual education curriculums. Nathan, for example, shared with me that he initially learned of feminism during middle school, sharing that "I think it might've been sex ed class when I was in grade 7 or something because they mentioned the birth control pill and it was somehow linked to feminism?" Here, Nathan highlights the importance of sex education as a salient moment for him in his understanding of feminism. It is also interesting that contemporary sexual health needs are framed as feminist needs as well. Other participants, such as David, also equated feminism to sexuality and consent education, citing their educational experience as a source of knowledge and exploration of feminism.

While high school education was highlighted as one of the participants' initial exposures to feminism, university education was also frequently cited as a positive transformation of their understanding of feminism. Men commonly stated the role of high school or earlier childhood learning environments as the site of their initial definition and familiarization with feminism and then discussed the role of the university and other post-secondary endeavors, such as clubs, friend groups, and campus culture as sites of redefinition and exploration of feminism. For example, Finn told me "I didn't really understand much basically or agree or disagree with much before I learned about it in university."

Mason also learned about feminism in school, and identified sociology courses as an impactful area for him to further his understanding of feminism:

I think sociology discussed feminism and if it didn't, other courses discussed it as well. I don't want to do the cliché "education actually works", but in this case, the university education quite literally explained things to me that I didn't understand before.

The contrast between high-school understanding of feminism versus university understanding was common in other interviews. For example, Noah reflected that his understanding of feminism in university differed from his expectation before post-secondary, stating that “It’s interesting because I learned about it in university and it’s different from how it sounds, I didn’t know much about it and it’s not brought up in high school.” Likewise, William expressed that “I think the University plays probably the greatest role [in introducing men to feminism] because it attracts people to the city.” What is interesting about William’s account of the role of the university is that he also links the university to urban space, and by association, links feminism with urban perspectives over rural perspectives.

In general, participants discussed their experience with university as a positive factor in their understanding of feminism. Men often emphasized the role of courses that focused on critical scholarship, such as sociology courses, as one of the informing factors in developing a more nuanced understanding of feminism. David shared that through the lecture of a guest speaker in their class on missing and murdered Indigenous women and the need for feminist activism, they felt that the entire cohort of men in the class shared the sentiment of “Oh my god, this is a problem,” highlighting the importance of university course experiences as positive influences on men's perception and engagement with feminism. In addition to their presence in courses, men also detailed the role of university campuses and campus resources, such as clubs that prioritize women and other marginalized communities' involvement as sites of feminist activism in their lives. Robert shared that he was able to see feminism at the University of Victoria through instances of “programs sending emails and stuff about meetings or lectures on recruiting more women to feminism and jobs,” highlighting not only coursework but also the

outreach available through university involvement as a positive influence on their perception of feminism in their lives.

Understanding feminism through proximity to women.

In addition to the media and school- based educations, participants' understandings of feminism were also impacted by their proximity to women. In these moments, participants described them as a positive contribution to their understanding of feminism. Men frequently expressed gratitude towards the women in their lives, often detailing their mothers, sisters, and girlfriends as being the people who influenced their understanding of feminism. When discussing the role of women in their lives, men commonly detailed their mothers as an example of someone engaging in feminism, or one of the people they were able to discuss feminism with during adolescence.

Often, this was linked to their mothers breaking stereotypes of domestic roles for women. Elijah told me about his mother:

It was definitely my mom. She likes to make it clear that there's no man or woman of the house, so I always grew up with that. My mum didn't always cook, my dad cooked. Or he would also do dishes because that's a stereotype that women do dishes.

Men also reflected that as they aged, their girlfriends became more influential factors in their understanding of feminism, highlighting their girlfriends' friend groups and interests as sites of education for their understanding of feminism. Benjamin shared that he had never considered feminism until he began dating his girlfriend, sharing that "starting to date [his girlfriend], she's in social work, so I got exposed to a lot more things." Other men also echoed the importance of intimate partners, such as William, who shared that he felt like his choice of feminist partners was also reflective of his socialization with women as a child. William elaborated that "I grew up with a lot of powerful women in my life and people I had previously dated were pretty powerful people like they would always be fighting forward." When asked if

they felt feminism was relevant in their lives, men would often reflect that, depending on their relationship status, the presence of women in their friend groups, or the distance or geographic proximity they felt towards their mothers and sisters, feminism was more or less relevant. Lucas shared that he only thought about feminism when attending events with his partner, detailing that “The only time I've ever thought about it is when my girlfriend is going to a drag show, or my friend's girlfriends are going to a drag show.” From his perspective, feminism was only of relevance to Lucas when his girlfriend or other women were attending events that he associated with feminism, such as drag shows. Of note, a drag show is an event usually hosted and performed by queer individuals, typically men or nonbinary folks. Thus, Lucas is equating two things in this statement; one is feminism with women attending queer events, and the other is queer events as a feminist event.

Other men also echoed the role of their partners and proximity to women as a determining factor in their engagement with feminism. For several of the participants, when they ceased to be as close to women, such as after a breakup or moving to a new city, feminism ceased to be as relevant in their lives. In our conversation, William told me:

Molly: So what role, if any, do you think that feminism plays in your daily life?

William: These days not so much, I haven't been talking to many girls lately. My ex and I broke up a few months ago, but obviously, I used to talk to her roommates about this kind of stuff.

This sentiment was echoed by Elijah, who shared that, following a recent move to Victoria to attend the University of Victoria, his community had shifted, impacting his relationship to feminism. Specifically, because his current circle of friends was mostly men, and he was newly living away from his mom and sister, Elijah felt that feminism and feminist events were less relevant in his life than they had been historically.

I don't really have lots of female friends here, I just got here, it's mostly just my roommates and they're all guys and they aren't really pushing anything like that. It's kind of the stereotypical young college guy attitude to have towards women. So there's not really a lot of pushing for participating in feminism in any way. The women in my life are my mom and my sister, and the events we would have in my town we would go, but those are the only times that I think it was brought up or talked about.

Taken together, interviews with participants reveal that the role of women in their lives and their proximity to women who they consider to have feminist ideals shaped their view of feminism.

For some, it made feminism relevant to them, even if they had an awareness of it. For others, it seemingly affirmed what they had learnt from other women in their lives at earlier ages.

Section III: Men and Masculinity in Relation to Feminism

This final section explores men's understanding of their own masculinity and manhood in relation to feminism. I find that men's response to feminism was also reflective of their perception of the social construction of masculinity. In what follows, I outline some of the most common statements about masculinity, men, and the relationship between men as social actors and feminism as a social trend.

Resistance to the label.

Participants often expressed conflicting or contradictory emotions about their masculinity and gender identities in the context of feminism. At times, this was referenced through statements of anxiety, fearing that, despite wanting to claim feminist identity, they would be seen as the oppressor because of their gender identity. Of interest, men often commonly stated that they assumed other men felt similarly in terms of alignment with values, but not with praxis. For example, Ryan told me:

I think most North American men would identify with the values of being feminist. I think most American men, if you asked do women deserve rights? They would say yeah.

Do you believe that women and men can do the same jobs? Yeah. I think this references what I was saying earlier, that they would be comfortable with the values [of feminism] but not the words.

Other men also expressed that they would be comfortable expressing their support for feminism as a form of gender equality, while also expressing resistance to identifying as a feminist. Often, men reflected that despite supporting various elements of feminism, they were unwilling or uncomfortable with the label. Repeatedly, this resistance to the label was linked to a sense that if they were to identify as a feminist, there would be behavioral expectations of them to engage in feminism. For Lucas, he was happy to support women in principle, but was reluctant to be behaviorally involved:

I'm here to support them. I support feminists, but I would never go out of my way a lot. I'm not one to be downtown doing protests. Even with things like the climate protest, there's one every year, and I fully support that, but I'm not one to go downtown and become involved.

David felt similar, in that he supports the ideas, but doesn't consider himself a feminist because he is not active in feminism:

Men can be [feminists], I would say, I would not say that I am because I'm not participating in the activism side of this...So I wouldn't identify as one. And I wouldn't go out of my way to get involved in conflict around it.

Elijah also expressed hesitation towards claiming the identity of a feminist given he did not currently participate in feminist events. Interestingly, he did not claim he was not a feminist necessarily, instead his response suggests a worry about the perception of whether he would be considered a feminist given his lack of presence at public feminist events:

It's not something that I think about a lot, when there were the feminist parades in our town I wasn't one to attend, just because I'm not a huge parade guy
I'm definitely pro-feminist but I don't know if I am a feminist
I'm a pretty pathetic feminist because I'm not really putting in the work to push it forward.

William also connected the labeling of feminist identity to contributing to social organizing.

From his perspective, he could not be a feminist, despite his avid support of feminist ideas and values, because he would not actively “[lead]” events he associated with feminist organizing:

I also think of a feminist as a label. The person that comes to mind is someone who's out there protesting somebody's out there protesting, somebody out there leading the charge. And because I'm not that person organizing meetings or actively organizing things, therefore, I'm not a feminist. I support it, but I'm not that person.

Across interviews, men reflected their support for feminism conceptually as the achievement of gender equality for women but were resistant to state that they were feminists because of concern over the implied action accompanying the label. Men frequently shared that despite their alignment with feminist values as a means of achieving liberation for women, in terms of actioning the values they were hesitant to claim ownership of the label of feminist. This was specifically linked to an aversion to public displays of activism such as protests, emphasizing these as being inherent to feminism, and thus inhibiting their opportunity for engagement.

Being “a good person” and a “good man” instead of “a feminist”.

In addition to resistance to the label of feminist by virtue of inactivity, men also commonly exhibited resistance to taking up the label of feminist by reducing feminism to “being a good person,” and by extension, “being a good man.” Michael emphasized this in our interview when he stated, “If you care about people, you’re a feminist. If you care about issues, you’re a feminist.” Here, Michael is equating feminism with basic care for other human beings. These statements aligned with other participant’s statements equating being a feminist with “being

good”. While David earlier resisted the label of feminism in part because of his lack of feminist action, he clarified how he sees himself and why he does not consider himself a feminist.

What I do try to do is in my day-to-day embody at least the responsibilities that I should embody as a man. And being a man involves you know, all the qualities that you and I have discussed. And the behaviors that you and I have discussed. And so if I want to be a good man, then I take that on. I don't think that makes me a feminist. I think at the level we're at now the standard definition of what it is to be a good person involves now some of the shit that it didn't use to. Now that shit is the standard, I would call it the standard rather than being feminist.

This excerpt from my conversation with David further demonstrates a trend in men's resistance to the label by reducing feminism to good behavior. David highlights the perspective that being a “good man” and behaving in ways that challenge historical trends of oppression is the same as being a feminist, without requiring identifying oneself as a feminist.

Participants often attempted to distance themselves from claiming a feminist identity while also emphasizing their alignment with feminist values when discussing their relationships with women. Consistently, men reflected that they engaged with feminism to the benefit of women around them, either overtly or implicitly denying the potential for feminism to offer anything to men. At times this was through their behavior, ensuring the safety of women in their social world, while others reflected that they embodied feminism through remaining conscious of the impact of social structures on women around them. Ryan reflected on this in our conversation, stating that his role in feminism was initially informed by the experience of the women around him in the world:

I think of it in the sense of growing up. When I think of the women in my life, particularly people I dated, I think there is a sense that there's this constant struggle to be accepted in society, particularly in the workforce. It's what I think of feminism, I think particularly of being good in my relationships. My role of being conscious of that fact.

In this excerpt, Ryan connects feminism to dating women and becoming attune to the challenges they face due to their gender identity. From his perspective, this being cognizant of the oppression that women face is akin to “being good”, and he considers this as being consistent with feminism. Other men also shared statements linking their behavior that aligned with feminism to behavior that would benefit the women around them, such as Michael:

Especially when I have interactions with women or people who I assume are women or people who present as feminine. Making sure that I'm not doing things that would make them feel uncomfortable.

Michael states that feminism is most relevant in his interactions with women in terms of guiding his behavior away from anything that might instill discomfort in the women around him. This further demonstrates the theme wherein men linked being conscious of oppression and discrimination towards women and behaving in a respectful manner as reflective of feminist beliefs and values, without necessarily stating their identity or behavior as feminist.

While some participants, such as Michael, felt feminism functioned to police his behavior positively, other participants claimed alignment with feminism through extrapolating the values of equality and liberation of feminism to other social justice movements. William offered a unique example in our conversation, as he shared the perspective that anyone engaged with making the world better would be engaged in social justice in some regard, aligning with feminism without necessarily self-identifying as a feminist. William elaborated that he wouldn't necessarily label himself a feminist because his involvement with social justice was more focused on climate change and environmental activism, stating “I don't know if I would be positioned to do that. I think everyone has to fight their own battles for society. I'm a ken, for the ecosystem, I'm not a feminist ken.” Here, William references the movie *Barbie*, specifically noting the character of “Ken,” a doll that embarks on a journey learning about the impact of the

patriarchy on his internalization of masculine gender norms. In particular, the movie spurred social discourse discussing the role of men as allies against injustice, as the Ken doll learns throughout the movie to align with the Barbies deconstructing his internalized belief in patriarchy. Thus, William highlights this trend by equating his engagement with social justice activism for environmental protection to feminism, without directly referencing feminism.

“It feels derogatory”: Feminist identity as a challenge to norms of masculinity

Within our discussions of resistance to feminism, many participants stated that they felt identifying with feminism posed a challenge to dominant social norms of masculinity. Participants commonly reflected that their perception of engaging in feminism as deviating from accepted masculine-coded behavior was a strong deterrent from self-identifying as a feminist. Often, these statements were accompanied by reaffirming their commitment to the ideological progress feminism might offer, while still expressing hesitancy or unwillingness to label themselves as feminists. Some participants stated that they assumed despite being open to feminist ideas, many men would not want to be labelled as feminists due to social pressures and stereotypes associated with the word. Mason expressed:

I would 100% say most men did not probably label themselves feminists even though they may have very similar views or opinions as I do. I think it's because It's kind of a buzzword, I guess it would say, and maybe a word that has a lot of baggage attached to it and I think a lot of people hear it and don't understand what's behind it.

When I asked Robert if he thinks lot of men consider themselves to be a feminist, he told me:

I think in terms of how they act and hold themselves in society yes, but if you asked them they would probably say no, cause almost again, modern feminism has painted this extremist label on it, but they act the same way I would act. I've never seen them do anything that would contradict what I would consider feminism.

Other participants emphasized that despite their alignment with feminism, they feared backlash from other men if they openly identified as a feminist. William shared that despite his support of feminism, he felt that if he shared his support of feminism openly, his masculinity would be called into question.

I'm here for it. I support it. What is interesting to me is that the connotation of being called the feminist as a man for some reason feels derogatory. Not in a "I'm feminine" kind of way, but I'm questioning now why I felt that way... like yeah I support women's rights and maybe that's a question of why is there a somewhat derogatory component for men to be called feminists? Like, obviously I do, but I didn't realize that maybe that's being called a feminist puts you in a camp that separates you from these other men? I mean, those people that don't agree with this stuff, they would almost want to use that as an insult, they would almost want to use that as a derogatory term, it's like they've started to own that. You know, it's like that calling you a liberal [if someone was a conservative]. There is this component of it being a derogatory term.

In this quote, William reflects on what he refers to as a separation between himself and other men, wherein he felt that by labelling himself a feminist, he would face backlash or aggression from other men because of the challenge feminism poses to dominant forms of masculinity. According to this perspective, taking up the label of feminist would be weaponized against him and used to question his masculinity. Another participant, Ryan, stated that he linked the concern of backlash from other men to a sense of "how modern feminism rejects masculinity and not wanting to have a fundamental part rejected by a culture. Nobody wants to feel that, not just men." In this quote, Ryan both agrees with the theme that engaging with feminism would deviate from prescribed norms of masculinity, but also highlights a fear of being rejected by his community because of this deviation.

This concern over the perceived challenge to dominant norms of masculinity continued to be echoed in other interviews as well, such as by linking their perception of men engaging with feminism with other communities that deviate from social norms of heteronormativity. One such

example that came up commonly in interviews was the queer community. Interestingly, this was common across interviews both with men that identified as pro-feminist, as well as men that reflected resistance to feminism, as well as with both queer and heterosexual men. One participant, Mason, stated when asked how he assumed men engaged with feminism and their potential willingness to take up the label “I don't think they would be describing themselves that way. I think you have to be a little bit involved to actually understand it, and it feels like straight men aren't as involved as queer men.” highlighting the trend in perceiving engagement with feminism as something that challenges norms of heteronormative masculinity by expressing the perception that queer men are inherently more involved with feminism by virtue of their identity differences. Another participant, Benjamin, shared that because he had grown up in a smaller town with less inclusivity towards folks that are gender and sexually diverse, he felt this was particularly relevant in Victoria as a liberal city, “Men over here, I think generally, are more open to expressing their feminine sides and hearing other perspectives and stories,” linking femininity and openness to subversive masculinities. In other interviews, men echoed the interpretation of feminism as being aligned with femininity and therefore subordinate forms of masculinity. The below excerpt from Ryan demonstrates this, specifically linking this perception to modern feminist movement rhetoric.

I think we see with modern feminism a very deep tie with the queer movement and the idea of queering things, and I think there's this really deep tie we have culturally between homosexuality and feminism in men. [...] And I think that is very cultured. I think that maybe the idea of being able to submit to a man, you know, or be submissive in a sexual context and exchange in that and search between those roles does perpetuate some idea of femininity. [...] But I think that generally men who feel artistically and creatively explorative often feel that implies homosexuality because of the narratives perpetuated by feminism.

Distancing from other men.

Across interviews, when discussing perceptions of feminism and associated masculine behavior patterns broadly, participants frequently delineated between themselves and other men by aligning their behavior with feminist ideals and delineating other men as challenging those same ideals. This was common in interviews with both pro-feminist men and men who expressed resistance to feminism. At times, this discussion was accompanied by examples of their own interpretation of feminism as most accurate, delineating other men as having missed the mark.

Nathan highlights this well:

Nathan: Yeah I guess for me, if I were to call myself a feminist I would want the definition to be equality between men and women. When I hear men who call themselves feminist today, when I hear them use that word I wouldn't think that would be the definition they use. I don't think we would see eye to eye on how the definition would be interpreted.

Molly: Interesting. And how do you think that other men are defining it?

Nathan: I'm not sure really. I think maybe not explicitly the superiority of women over men, but it does seem implicit from the actions that I've seen.

Molly: So just making sure I've got it, you feel that men who currently identify as feminists are for the domination of women over men?

Nathan: Yeah I mean if you asked them I don't think they would say that, but it does feel tucked away subconsciously

Interestingly, this was common regardless of whether participants expressed positive or negative attitudes towards feminism. While Nathan ultimately did not identify as a feminist, men who did identify more positively with feminism were also quick to emphasize that their definition as more accurate than others. Eric, who shared that he identified as a feminist, told me:

I think that most men probably don't say they're feminists. Maybe above 50%. And even if they did say, they may not necessarily feel everything that I feel and everything that I feel comes with saying that.

Here, Eric highlights both his emotional attachment as being more valid to feminism than other men, as well as his perspective that other men would be less likely to identify as a feminist as a result.

In addition to the perspective that their relationship to feminism was unique from other men, participants also commonly delineated between themselves and men that could gain something from engaging with feminism. Participants shared that they felt feminism was most relevant for men whose behavior reflected negative perceptions of women, emphasizing feminism as a method for social change. Eric stated

Some people have to learn how to act in a way that treats women properly, how they should be treated because some people don't treat women well and they have to learn how to do that. So for those people, I think feminism probably plays a significant role in their lives.

Other participants echoed this sentiment that the value that feminism offers was not of the utmost relevance to them, commonly sharing a sense of frustration that they felt men be interpreted as a broad category synonymous with misogyny and a lack of ability to engage with feminism. For example, Benjamin shared that through moving to Victoria for University he realized that his definition of feminism was different from those of his friends because "I thought of women as equal so I was different than my friends because I think some of my friends thought of women as lesser." Benjamin's reflecting highlights this theme whereby men associated those who didn't align with feminism as behaving more in alignment with misogynistic ideals.

Anxiety about engaging correctly.

A final theme in interview findings was that men expressed anxiety or concern around their engagement with feminism. Specifically, the men I interviewed often reflected that they worried they engaged “incorrectly,” despite positioning their interpretation of feminism as accurate. Most often, this was referenced in discussions of their interpretation of allyship towards women, wherein men such as Robert, described feeling that his attempts to engage in feminist behavior were unappreciated by women on campus.

Walking around on campus it’s like walking around on eggshells, or not even eggshells more like minefields. [...] Because again feminism is like women should be independent and doing things for themselves, and yes you should I’ll support you, but for example sometimes when you hold the door open for a woman you get a weird look and I’ve even had scenarios where they’re like “why would you do that I’m capable of opening a door myself.” [...] And I’m fully well aware you have the capability of opening a door, I’ve just been raised to be this way and open a door. [...] So sometimes you almost get fire back from it in a way? And It almost makes you hesitant about what you should do because I don’t want to piss someone off by holding a door open for them or picking up a pencil for them.

In this quote, Robert’s anxiety is linked to the potential backlash he might receive if his behavior was misinterpreted by women, reflecting worries of his reinforcing traditional beliefs of gender roles. This was echoed in other interviews as well, particularly regarding the potential to receive backlash for doing something in the name of “being nice.” Other men referenced a similar sentiment of worry, such as Benjamin, who shared a story wherein he tried to help his feminist roommate with a task in the kitchen. Benjamin shared that despite his best intentions, she responded negatively, stating that he was “the patriarchy embodied.” Resultantly, he expressed grief over the misinterpretation of his action, as well as linked this interaction to continued anxiety over engagement with feminism. Benjamin told me:

So anyways I thought I was trying to do something nice in my mind, which was perceived as being a masculine thing of pushing down women, so then I had to leave the

situation because I felt like I was in the wrong not helping a feminist, where like I wanted to help but I couldn't because I was a man. So I feel like it can be pushed with the right intention but in the wrong way, delivered the wrong way, and it comes off negative, and it ruins the movement. And it doesn't take a lot of people to ruin the movement because it's such a touchy thing.

Here, Benjamin highlights that his fear of backlash from feminists was a deterrent to his engagement with feminism, and links this backlash to specifically his identity as a man. This concern was most often noted as a deterrent to further engagement, as men expressed grief over the sense that despite their best intentions, they were still concerned over the interpretation of their behavior by feminists. One participant, Ryan, summarized this as “a significant portion of men feel deeply fearful that when they speak about feminism and their perspective they will be cast in the perspective of an abuser or oppressor,” highlighting the emotion of fear and resistance to engage by virtue of societal interpretations of men as inherently oppressive by virtue of their gender identity.

Discussion

The findings sections of this thesis reveal the various ways that men understand and engage with feminism, and how they understand themselves (and their masculinity) in relation to feminism. Despite not indicating their alignment with specific typologies of feminism, men's responses indicate positive attitudes towards liberal feminism, mostly associated with the ideas and goals of the first and second waves of feminism. I find that these young men continue to express a deep resistance to the label of feminist, yet express appreciation and alignment with feminist values and attitudes. These findings echo trends in existing literature exploring men's relationship with feminism, indicating that perhaps a greater awareness of oppression has not contributed to a positive shift in men's willingness to identify with feminism. What is interesting, however, is that the participants I spoke with offered a variety of justifications for their continued distancing from feminism. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of these justifications, and highlight how interpretations of normative, hegemonic masculinity prevent men from engaging in practices that might be socially constructed as feminine, such as engaging in social justice activism.

Willingness to Engage with Liberal Feminism

In men's definitions of feminism, they did not identify different streams of feminist thought and therefore did not explicitly identify liberal feminism as most salient. However, when considering themes within the findings, the elements that men associate most positively with are consistent with liberal feminist ideas, such as increasing women's rights to be equal in the workplace to those of men. While liberal feminism is much too broad to be fully dissected within this section, three key themes in men's responses suggest their understanding of feminism as being consistent with this stream of thought.

First, liberal feminism proposes a gender essentialist perspective of womanhood, arguing for the liberation of women through reductive language universalizing the gender category of women. This stream is also consistent with a universalization of women, often critiqued in the literature for reducing women to a homogenous identity grouping, typically that of white, heterosexual, middle-class women (Kearney 2012; Kinser 2004; Snyder 2008). Men commonly shared their support for feminism in the context of liberation for their mothers, sisters, and intimate partners, consistently emphasizing their appreciation for feminism as a path to reduce oppression for the women in their lives. Outside of noting their age and relationship differences, men rarely, if at all, acknowledged any difference in the lived experience that these women may face. Consequently, their statements universalize the oppression of women, inferring that challenges faced by their mothers would be recreated at a younger age by their intimate partners, despite the obvious difference in roles that mothers, sisters, and intimate partners occupy. Through their lack of acknowledgement of any element of difference, men's statements align with the universalization of women consistent with liberal feminist rhetoric, as challenges faced by one woman are assumed to be faced by all (Snyder 2008).

The second element of liberal feminism in men's responses is their emphasis on equality through the public sphere as elements of feminism in praxis. When asked to define feminism, men consistently reflected that feminism is a practice engaged in by women, for the liberation of other women. Specifically, their answers detailed this liberation as freedom from oppression through an increase in equality in the workplace, accessing birth control and reproductive care, as well as expressing their support for legislation that they deemed geared to "protect" women in their lives. These ideas are consistent with liberal feminist pursuits, as this stream of feminism focuses on pursuing equality through policy changes in the public domain, such as through

legislative changes protecting women's rights to fair treatment (Kearney 2012). Notably, there are also elements of liberalist thought found within first-wave suffragist activism aimed at acquiring political equality for women through the right of the person (Kinser 2004). Men also commonly indicated their support for suffragist feminism, unanimously indicating their support for women's political equality and access to the right of the person through voting. Related to their identification of women's access to equal payment and agency in the workplace as examples of feminism, the data revealed that men also struggled to identify feminism as existing outside of structural oppression. For example, consider that women having the right to vote is a reflection of structural inequality in law, and lack of equal access to wages is a reflection of structural workplace inequality. Consequently, the lack of discussion of elements of inequality in their micro realm, such as confronting peers about perpetuating misogynistic behavior, demonstrates that men struggled to consider the role that feminism might play in their everyday interactions. Thus, through only identifying structural inequality that could be addressed through policy change, men's responses reflect elements of liberal feminism in their definitions.

Finally, men's responses condemning forms of advocacy that challenge notions of liberal feminism also indicate their alignment with this stream of feminist thought. Men often defined feminism through statements of support for equal payment, while expressing distaste that contemporary feminist activism had shifted towards a more disrespectful, overt, or aggressive form of behavior and activism. This distaste is consistent with liberal interpretations of feminism, as liberal feminism advocates for reform through the contemporary structure, meaning that liberal democracy is maintained (Baehr 2021). Within this framework, patriarchy is also maintained, as women can access further resources only through structures that are inherently built to reinforce men's access to power (Baehr 2021). Through framing past waves of feminism

as “peaceful, respectful protests,” men established liberal feminism as the valid form of feminism. In comparison, men’s statements that contemporary waves of feminism had shifted from advocating for equality to instead encourage ‘anti-masculine’ sentiments and a focus on empowering women through disempowering men further reinforces men’s understandings of feminism as that of liberal feminism, as if feminism was to disempower men on a macro structural scale, that would disrupt existing liberal democratic structures. Additionally, protests that empower women to be aggressive or domineering challenge existing gender norms, thus misaligning with dominant patriarchal gender norms in Western culture that assert women should be nurturing and quiet. Through emphasizing modern feminism as having exceeded the pursuit of equality, men’s definitions present a form of feminism that aims to empower women, but only so much as it maintains the existing patriarchal status quo, consistent with the goals of liberal feminism.

Men’s examples of feminism as reflecting an understanding that is consistent with liberal feminism builds on trends in existing literature, as well as highlights some of the reasoning behind their willingness or resistance to identify with the label of ‘feminist.’ It has been well documented that men are most likely to identify with feminism and feminist values when framed in a way that is consistent with liberal feminism (Breen and Karpinski 2008; Houvouras and Carter 2008; Ogletree et al. 2017). In comparison, when feminism is presented in a way that challenges patriarchal values, such as radical feminism, men often express more resistance (Houvouras and Carter 2008; Breen and Karpinski 2008; Ogletree et al. 2017). My findings echo this, as men often indicated their wariness of feminism as being linked to stereotypes of feminists as “loud,” “aggressive,” or “man-hating,” typically noting these to be reinforced by social media. However, this resistance is also interesting in that often after sharing their disinterest in feminism

that they deemed not inclusive towards men, men also emphasized that they also knew these statements to be incorrect and that feminists were not ‘actually’ hateful towards men. The clarification that not all feminists behave in a way that is loud or man-hating is further indicative of the internalization of liberal feminism, as men are emphasizing their support for *some* feminists whose behaviour still aligns with the ideals of women being appropriate, nurturing and sensitive. Consequently, men’s clarifications that they understand these stereotypes as incorrect, are in some ways still endorsing liberal feminism’s reinforcement of patriarchal frameworks. Thus, men’s distaste for feminism that seeks to disrupt and challenge existing structures, thus challenging the status quo that protects patriarchal privilege, demonstrates that even in their distaste men agree with feminism only if it is liberal.

Participants’ understanding of liberal feminism also enables a type of ‘hands off’ approach to feminist allyship noted in the literature, wherein men are able to claim the label at times that suit them while distancing themselves at others (Messner 2016). Through framing oppression as a structural issue and not one requiring individual mobilization, consistent with liberal feminist pursuits of equality through policy rather than grassroots advocacy, feminism becomes more accessible to men as they don’t have to identify the ways that inequality might manifest in their lives, or the resulting ways they could work to address it (Drury and Kaiser 2014). In this way, men can express support for feminism, without necessarily taking direct action or incurring any loss of power themselves. Furthermore, existing literature has highlighted that often liberal feminism isn’t thought of as feminism, as liberal ideologies have become more interwoven into institutions such as education and thus normalized (Liss et al. 2000). Resultantly, men’s reflections of positive attitudes towards feminism reflecting beliefs of liberal feminism is

unsurprising, as it is the stream most accessible within current neoliberal institutions, as well as functions to retain power within masculine structures.

Discomfort Identifying as Feminists

Existing research notes that often younger generations may identify positively with feminist values, yet identify negatively with the label of ‘feminist’ (Bettencourt et al. 2011; Russell et al. 2023). The data gathered in this research also reflects this trend, as overall men were more likely to endorse feminist attitudes than claim a feminist identity. The attitudes that feminists are women who hate men, and that feminism reflects extreme views that seek to overthrow current power structures to the deficit of men, are also unsurprising and reflected in existing literature. Of greater interest in the data gathered for this research are the justifications given for why men were uncomfortable claiming the label of feminist, as these offer interesting new areas of exploration in men’s willingness or discomfort engaging with feminism. One such justification can be seen through their alignment with the “I’m not a feminist but...” trend, commonly found in research with young women (Schneider 1985). This refers to a trend wherein women refuse to claim the label of a feminist for fear of repercussions due to the stigmatizing of feminist identities, yet claim the values set associated with feminism. An example of this could be someone rejecting a feminist label, but emphasizing their support for gender equality in their workplace. In our interviews, men frequently detailed their alignment with feminist values but expressed an unwillingness or confusion at their ability to identify as a feminist. One such example is William, whose quote titles this research, “I’m a ken for the ecosystem, I’m not feminist ken,” thus indicating that they pursue social justice through avenues that align with feminism, but would not self-identify as a feminist. This was echoed in other discussions with

men, often indicating their unwillingness to identify as feminists despite their agreement with feminist values in other areas of their lives.

A second example of men trying to identify with feminism while avoiding the feminist label can also be seen through their reduction of feminism to “being good.” Participants’ responses that they didn’t need to claim the label of feminist, and rather could align with feminism through behaviour and “being good” or “being aware” to support the women in their lives was a consistent pattern in their responses. Worthy of note, this “being good” was often presented synonymously with not perpetuating sexualized violence or sexism in the workplace, thus still engaging with liberal structures. This tendency to reduce engagement with feminism to being “good”, effectively erasing feminism altogether from the conversation, calls to mind the concept of “discursive distancing” as put forth by Bridges and Pascoe (2014). According to the authors, men tend to position themselves outside of power structures, thus retaining their social capital while simultaneously accessing traits that have been historically feminized. In this way, men can embody what can be understood as “hybrid masculinity”, essentially adopting feminized traits topically without relinquishing their masculine privilege (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). When considering that within liberal feminism, men can engage with feminist ideals without necessarily restructuring oppressive structures, practices of discursive distancing also function to reaffirm their rejection of direct engagement with feminism by distancing themselves from the structural gender inequality that feminism seeks to address.

Part of this cohort of young men’s discomfort with identifying with feminism is also linked to their understanding of feminism as liberal feminism. Liberal feminism asserts that men are welcome within feminism, and is commonly associated with men engaging in feminist-allied behaviour through employment opportunities, such as policy development and anti-violence

work (Russell et al. 2024). The men consistently shared in our conversations that they were uncomfortable identifying as a feminist, specifically concerning the sense that this required engagement with feminism in an action-oriented manner. In their research, Breen and Karpinski (2008) found that young men most often identified positively with liberal feminist values, but were neutral or unwilling to identify as a feminist. The authors reported that men justified their unwillingness to identify with the label as linked to the perspective that feminism is a pursuit for equality for women and thus is a woman-centric movement, and thus would be inappropriate for men to engage with feminism as feminist actors, rather than allied bystanders (Breen and Karpinski 2008). Consequently, men's identification as being in support of liberal feminist attitudes, while simultaneously expressing hesitation at the expectation of engagement, reproduces a contradiction found in existing literature wherein men are aware of the ways that they align with feminist values, yet feel unable to identify as feminist because they view their gender identity as fundamentally incompatible with the movement itself.

The consequences of reducing feminism to an ambiguous 'goodness' while relying on liberal feminism as a framework can be seen through the potential ambivalent sexism in men's engagement with feminist values. Within ambivalent sexism, men split women into subgroups of "good" and "bad" (Glick, Diebold and Zhu 1997). Consequently, women that are deemed "bad," usually women who challenged traditional gender roles through being more career ambitious and exhibiting less domestic traits, are subject to hostile sexism (Glick et al. 1997:1332). In comparison, women who align with traditional gender roles fall within the "good" category, and are instead subject to benevolent sexism, whereby attitudes towards them may seem positive on paper, but these women are still perceived as being inferior to men (Glick et al. 1997: 1332). By asserting that they don't need to engage with feminism specifically, these men believe they can

instead embody it through hypothetical goodness aimed at protecting women, thereby reproducing a binary understanding that *some* women, such as their intimate partners or sisters, are deserving of equality and are thus in the “good” group. Existing literature has also indicated that this is common in younger folks’ interpretation of feminism, as liberal feminism and ambivalent sexism both work to reinforce the gender status quo (Russell et al. 2024), thus maintaining patriarchal power. Resultantly, when considering their definitions consistently reflected understanding and alignment with liberal feminism, these men’s perspectives both highlight elements of ambivalent sexism, offering evidence to suggest that the two theories may function to reinforce and justify one another.

Anxieties About Masculinity and Feminism

The first section of this discussion argues that these men’s understandings of feminism reflect beliefs of liberal feminism, highlighted through a discussion of various key elements and linking them to liberal feminist ideologies. The second section explores these men’s resistance to the label of feminist, offering various examples of ways that men offered their alignment with feminist attitudes while also disavowing the label. The final section of this discussion argues that consistent with past literature, the way that men in this study understand and engage with feminism reflects an internal struggle with normative ideas of masculinity, suggesting that their responses point to a turning point in Western understanding of masculinity and the challenges that young men face in balancing their perceived gender role with activism that disrupts hegemonic power.

Within their definitions of feminism, participants presented a consistent contradiction without resolution. On the one hand, they asserted that feminism is an inherently woman-centric movement consistent with structural change, and thus their identities as men are incompatible

with the movement. On the other hand, the men asserted that *some men* can engage with feminism, but only if they lack the privilege consistent with hegemonic normative masculinity. Consequently, whether men identify with feminism is more complicated than merely the binary of acceptance or rejection, reflecting their internalization of normative masculinity, as has long been noted in critical masculinity scholarship (Hoel 2015; Kean and Buiten 2024). Within this range of attitudes and identifications, historical trends also point to the influence of social events and trends on men's engagement with feminism, such as the emergence of consciousness raising groups in the 70s drawing inspiration from the women's movement of the prior decades (Messner 1998; Messner 2016). My findings confirm and extend these findings, suggesting that despite their continued reports of resistance to feminist labels, as well as positive endorsement of liberal feminist ideas, their justifications for their attitudes towards feminism are reflective of ongoing debates around what it means to be a man in 2024. Specifically, their responses reflect the ongoing tension between shifting cultural understanding around masculinity and power, and the barriers with which those processes inhibit men's ability to engage in social justice.

In our discussions, men frequently delineated queer men as a demographic of men that they assumed were likely to identify with feminism. Despite their reservations about heterosexual men being feminist, men emphasized that queer men could likely partake in feminism more easily because of the relationship between queer liberation and feminist goals of equality. This has been long noted in existing literature, as men have commonly expressed that they perceive feminist men as being more feminine than other men, and commonly stereotype feminist men as gay (Kimmel 2010; Rudman et al. 2013). However, when the men did acknowledge queer men as a demographic most likely to engage in feminism, it was not done so through overt homophobia. In fact, their statements revealed an assignment of social capital

through emphasizing that queer men were more likely to be emotionally open and willing to hear new ideas, traits that are generally accepted as positive in contemporary social climates. Thus, their identification of queer men as a demographic more involved with feminism is not necessarily in alignment with more historically overt linkages of queer men with feminism, such as through homophobic statements linking queer men to women (Anderson 2009). Despite this, their statements do in some ways still reflect a hegemony of masculinity, as whether conscious or subconsciously their answers reflect the way that queer men are linked to feminine pursuits through a questioning of their manhood by virtue of their sexuality. Specifically, because hegemonic masculinity is intertwined with notions of heterosexuality, “when hegemonic manhood is threatened, it almost always lashes out sexually. Thus do all the *others* become sexualized” Kimmel 2010: 66). Therefore, despite associating positive qualities with queer men, that the men in this study still identified queer men as more likely to be feminist points to, at minimum, an internalization of feminized and marginalized men with feminism.

Persistence of hegemonic masculinity within hybrid masculinities.

The influence of hegemonic masculinity within these men’s responses to feminism can also be seen in their expressions of worry over other men’s perceptions. Contradicting their statements that queer men could be feminist without emphasizing elements of marginalization, these men also reflected that they felt to be identified as a feminist would be derogatory, specifically if noted by other men. Several men stated they felt to be labeled a feminist would be derogatory, that their manhood would be called into question, and that this fear of rejection by other men deterred them from engagement. An example of this would be William, who emphasized first that he was in support of feminism, but that he worried that other men would perceive feminist men as “either queer or not really masculine”. These statements offer evidence

of hybrid masculinity in practice, whereby men embody traits they deem socially desirable, borrowing from marginalized masculinities without sacrificing their power through initially offering queer men as a demographic with desirable traits (emotional openness, willingness to engage in social justice) while also distancing themselves from this demographic in practice (Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

In this research, men's ability to depoliticize their alignment with feminism through the reduction of the movement to "being good" and espousing alignment with feminist values reflects a desirable trait in that being emotionally engaged and committed to social justice (Anderson 2009). In comparison, statements distancing themselves from the label in response to a fear of being scrutinized as a lesser man reflects an internalized commitment to hegemonic norms, thus reflecting the "hybrid" element of hybrid masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014: 246). Furthermore, a consequence of hybrid masculinities is that the processes of adoption of new traits works to both obscure contemporary processes of inequality and marginalization, as well as reinforce existing ideologies of power and hegemony through changing the appearance of oppression (Bridges and Pascoe 2014: 247). Building on this, a demographic most often "borrowed" from are queer men, typically traits of identity that have been coded as either gay or feminine (Bridges and Pascoe 2014: 247; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Resultantly, men's endorsement of queer men as more likely to engage in feminism through the assignment of positive social capital, while reinforcing their distance from feminism through expressions of worry over their potential loss of capital, demonstrates a reinforcement of hegemonic norms through new beliefs and behaviours consistent with theories of hybrid masculinity.

Considering that hegemonic masculinity is broadly understood as a pattern of behaviour and traits that can be adopted and shifted to reflect emerging social norms (Connell and

Messerschmidt 2005), the participant's portrayal of openness towards feminism while simultaneously distancing and othering feminist men suggests that young men are navigating contradictions in their relationships with feminism that may not have existed historically. As Pease (2012) argues, despite a marked increase in the positive socialization that men ought to be emotionally soft, expressive, and sensitive over the past few decades, men still regularly confront the pre-existing normative and traditional approaches to performing their masculinity. This was evidenced in this study as men expressed resistance to feminism over fear of their masculinity being questioned, noting that queer men would be more in alignment due to their identity and perceived ability to engage in care work without the same oppressive gendered constraints.

Caring about feminism and care work as incompatible with hegemonic masculinity

Consistently in interviews men discussed their anxiety about engaging with feminism, and presented various justifications, such as the reduction of feminism discussed above, for their unwillingness to identify as feminists. Ultimately, there is no way of knowing how men might be presenting their anxiety and perception of other men. However, the responses from participants discussing the anxiety they felt regarding an inability to engage with feminism and a subsequent refusal to identify with the movement also highlights tensions in men's engagement with caring and emotions. Hanlon (2012) suggests that at times men may feign incompetence and intentionally make mistakes in order to avoid expectations to participate in care work (193). Specifically, this pattern is linked to the privilege men access within patriarchal societies because they are often not expected to care because women and other feminized groups are socialized to fulfill more emotionally involved roles (Hanlon 2012: 194). In this way, despite the potential for the participants to be legitimately anxious about their involvement, the reliance on their anxiety

as a justification for not engaging with feminism further suggests a potential reliance on stereotypes of masculine incompatibility and incompetence in engaging with care work.

The incompatibility of caring with masculinity can also be linked to participants delineation of queer men as more naturally attuned to feminism. In existing research, men who have resisted engaging with care work have suggested that to do so would contradict their gender identity, and thus despite supporting equality in principle, they are unwilling to sacrifice their privilege in order to engage (Hanlon 2012: 196). Essentially, “becoming a carer can be experienced by men as emasculation because it asks them to stop being a man” (Hanlon 2012: 194). Thus, the discussion of anxiety and incompatibility with feminism expressed by participants is remedied by the delineation of queer men as attuned to feminism and caring reflects stereotypes of queer men as ‘lesser’ men, and is also reflective of research exploring men’s justifications for not engaging in care work.

Neoliberal masculinities.

Building on the themes of liberalism present through interviews, analysis of interview data suggests a considerable pattern wherein both traditional norms of masculinity are present at the same time as more progressive and liberal forms, allowing men to praise queer men and traits they associate with femininity, without risking losing masculine social capital. The full implications of this cannot be assessed at the present time, but the data collected in this study confirms Connell’s assertion that hegemonic masculinity would always be subject to change as masculine power and culture is inconsistent and complex (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Furthermore, these men also reflected that they supported various elements of feminism, and sought to embody it by reducing feminism from a politicized topic to instead an alignment with being “good,” a pattern that reflects the tendency within hybrid masculinities to fortify symbolic

social boundaries and reproduce social hierarchies in more subtle “softer” ways (Bridges 2015: 255). When accounting for the lack of popularity of the term “patriarchy” in recent decades, as well as the increase in calls of masculinity in crisis, scholars have highlighted that this loss of legitimacy for patriarchal power has forced different groups of men to negotiate their identity in the social world in new ways (Bridges 2014: 255; Connell 1995). Thus, through the presence of both traditional and liberal perspectives on gender roles within feminist identity, the data collected in this study suggests a new avenue of tension that men may be navigating at the present moment, one that would inform their engagement with feminism implicitly.

A factor that contextualizes participants’ responses to feminism is the continued popularity of neoliberal beliefs and policies, and their subsequent impact on gender roles. I suggest that the presence of both traditional and liberal perspectives of gender roles in men’s responses concerning involvement with feminism reflects the current tensions of what it means to ‘be a man’. Following shifts throughout the late twentieth century, understandings of what men are to be and how men ought to behave have shifted to reflect global shifts towards neoliberalism (Wolfman et al. 2021). While neoliberalism is alone worthy of a thesis exploring the impact on gender, Garlick (2023) states that neoliberalism can be broadly understood as:

A globally dominant set of capitalist economic policies, typically focusing on deregulation, austerity, privatization and competitive markets, as well as a set of political and social practices for governing people's lives through encouraging them to view themselves as bearers of human capital and individual responsibility. (Garlick 2023: 170)

Following the continued neoliberalization of Western societies over the last few decades, men’s roles shifted from those of a pre-neoliberal subject who was a rational, profit-driven man, to the neoliberal subject, a man who rejects outside influence and is a keen capitalist (Wolfman et al. 2021: 219). Resultantly, neoliberalism has led to a marriage of traditional gender roles and gendered divisions with more progressive beliefs of masculinity (i.e. conceptualizing men as the

primary breadwinner, yet also encouraging men to consume beauty products and engage in more feminized pursuits). As a result, men mobilize hybrid masculinities as a means to balance the shifting ideals wherein what it means to ‘be a man’ seems unclear or contradictory (Wolfman et al. 2021: 219). When considering that normative beliefs of gender encourage or inhibit behaviour, such as social justice being a feminized pursuit, this has consequences on men’s willingness to engage in feminism.

The ways that the men’s responses attempted to balance both traditional and liberal beliefs of masculinities reflect what Wolfman et al. (2021) describe as the concept of ‘hollow femininities’, whereby hybrid masculinities adapt to meet new needs emerging from neoliberalism. Within this concept, as a manner of recuperating masculinity that has become challenged through neoliberalism, men claim forms of femininity, such as self-care, but not forms that might overthrow or subvert dominant norms of masculinity (Wolfman et al. 2021:220). Thus, the concept of hollow femininities enables men to employ hybrid masculinities “when the neoliberal subjectivity requires certain skills and capacities of men that have long been considered feminine” (Wolfman et al. 2021: 230). Men’s admissions of experiencing anxiety about their ability to engage as feminists, as well as their desire to be allies in some way (albeit echoing trends of ambivalent sexism), suggest they align with progressive masculinities. Simultaneously, the concern that other men would perceive them as lesser and distancing from identifying as feminist suggests an internalization of a hierarchy of masculinities. In doing so, the ways that men discussed their engagement with feminism is evocative of the hollow femininities offered by Wolfman et al. (2021) as an attempt to balance the uncertain or conflicting ideals around what it means to be a man in contemporary society. Additionally, this study further confirms and extends past research that has suggested that men’s responses to feminism are

linked to their understanding of self, and must be contextualized within specific social locations (Bettencourt et al. 2011). In the case of this study, the social location of participants as a cohort of men coming of age during a time of increasing neoliberalization and the resulting shifts in how masculinity is performed not only contextualizes these findings, but also potential explains some of the contradictions in men's responses.

Conclusion

Recommendations

In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that men and boys are capable and frequently willing to change their attitudes and adopt practices to support gender equality (WHO 2010). Based on the data collected in this research, it would seem that this observation holds true for many of the men interviewed, despite being 14 years later. At the end of our interviews, men would often express their thanks, asked if they could hear my perspective and personal definition of feminism, or admitted that they had felt quite worried coming into the interview and now felt more comfort discussing feminism. These interactions suggest that despite the limitations associated with definitions of feminism that reflect liberal feminism, as well as a general distancing from the label of 'feminist,' these young men do want to engage with feminism and push forth an agenda for gender equality in some manner.

However, certain trends in the data demonstrate challenges in men's engagement with feminism. One such challenge can be seen through the reduction of inequality to structural and policy challenges in liberal feminist beliefs, reducing opportunities for men to consider the ways that they may reproduce inequality in their individual lives. Relatedly, another challenge can be seen in the tendency for men to express their willingness to engage with feminist ideas rather than feminist identities, depicting marginalized men as more likely to assume a feminist identity. Given that hegemonic masculinity functions to subordinate both women and other men (Connell 1989), men reproduce elements of inequality that retain their power through employing strategies such as hybrid masculinities. Thus, my findings echo a trend in existing literature, emphasizing that men's understanding of feminism is much more nuanced than simple acceptance or rejection (Holmgren and Hearn 2009; Drury and Kaiser 2014), and that their leverage of masculinity and gender politics must be considered in their interpretations of feminism.

This research offers new points of consideration for all who seek to engage with men in feminism, but perhaps the most significant finding is that these young men struggle to understand how their masculinity could be performed in a way that is supportive of feminism. This finding is particularly relevant to those who attempt to motivate young men to engage with feminism, as existing literature has highlighted that in order to mobilize men in reducing instances of gender inequality, there is a need to focus on their understandings of masculinity and liberation from hegemonic normative ideals that limit men's ability to engage in feminized behaviour (Ratele 2015). Some suggestions for how this may be accomplished involve engaging with discourses on gender that include men and boys, disentangling the relationship between masculinity as a gendered practice and men and boys as actors within a patriarchal structure (Ratele 2015: 154). By providing a more economically, culturally, and politically informed understanding of men's and boy's lives in relation to women and girls (as well as those whose gender identity transcends the binary), we may begin to understand better why men might resist engaging with feminism (Ratele 2015: 153). Thus, the findings of this study support existing research that notes that initiatives to engage men in gender equality must transcend pressuring men into allyship. Instead, these initiatives should focus on educating and encouraging men to deconstruct their relationship to hegemonic masculine norms as a formative process that will encourage their future feminist allyship.

Limitations

As with all studies, this research is not without limitations. This research is an exploratory qualitative study with a small number of participants in a very specific location and socio-economic location (a university). The data gathered is meant to address the research question, and therefore not meant to be interpreted as applicable to other research questions or settings.

The participants were recruited from the same university in the Pacific Northwest of Canada, and thus the results are limited to this specific social setting and may not account for differences in opinion in other settings, such as non-university students who were still within the same age demographic. Relatedly, this study is also focused on the contributions of men's masculinity to their understanding of feminism, and leverages literature that is centered around a Western paradigm of masculinity. The data gathered and the conclusions drawn in this research are therefore limited to this specific cultural and geographic context, as more Eastern or Indigenous frameworks may have different understandings of masculinity.

There are several limitations to this study resulting from the characteristics of the sample and the subsequent lack of generalizability of the findings. The group of thirteen men whom I spoke with was small because there are challenges associated with recruiting men to discuss something that is both vulnerable and stigmatized in the way that feminism is for men. Thus, the sample was capped at a respectful but narrow size, reducing the generalizability of the findings. The participants were also recruited through snowball sampling, and thus the potential for volunteer bias offers a further limitation within the data, as those more likely to volunteer to participate in a project exploring men's perspectives of feminism might be more versed in feminist ideas or language than others within the general population. In addition, as the majority of the men who participated in this study were both white and heterosexual, these men may also have felt more comfortable engaging in a study that took place on a university campus than others who may be more marginalized, such as more racialized men, further highlighting the limitation of the sample of participants. A final limitation related to the sample demographics is that despite the option for trans men to participate in this research, as the only criteria for enrolment in the study was that men were between the ages of 18-26 and enrolled at the

university of Victoria, all participants self-identified as cis-gendered. Resultantly, the data gathered might not be reflective of the perspectives of transgender men, and thus this also poses a limitation to the generalizability of the findings.

Finally, despite my reflexivity throughout the research process, there is a possibility that my personal experience as a woman who experiences marginalization within the patriarchy may have influenced my focus in terms of exploring topics in interviews. Within the framing of feminism as a woman-centric practice, I am also assigned authority over feminism, which compounds my power in the interview setting as the interviewer. Throughout the course of this research and the summary of the data, I tried to honor the participants' voices. However, I do also recognize that my familiarity with definitions of feminism may have informed the themes that I interpreted within the data, which could also be a potential limitation within this research.

Directions for future research

In terms of future research in this area, there are plenty of opportunities to continue exploring the nature of men's relationship to feminism. As noted within the limitations section, this sample is limited to a specific demographic of men. Given that this study focused primarily on individual men's understanding of feminism, and within that their understanding of their own masculinity was identified as a contributing factor. Considering this, further research could explore different archetypes of masculinity and how the men who engage in these masculinity politics understand the impact of their masculinity on their understanding of feminism.

Another potential avenue that deserves greater investigation is the nature of the relationship of the factors contributing to men's understanding. For example, within this research social media was identified as a common avenue through which men learned about feminism. Men stated that they recognized the pitfalls of social media as a platform for learning about the

social world, yet they also emphasized that social media was one of the most prominent avenues through which they learned about feminism. This contradiction offers a potential avenue for future research, as men admitted they were aware of social media creating an echo chamber, and yet still internalized the message that feminism is synonymous with the hatred of men rather than gender equality. Earlier feminist theorizing has asserted consistently that men's awareness of inequality is a contributing factor to men engaging in solidarity and allyship, linking the growth of pro-feminist men's groups in the '90s to increased awareness of the nuances of oppression (Bettencourt et al. 2011). Social media has offered a new, accessible, and free way to disperse knowledge of inequality, and would therefore be expected to positively influence men's understanding of feminism. Despite this, the data gathered suggests that the supposed relationship is not necessarily accurate and that social media is more commonly an accelerator for men to develop negative perceptions of feminist activism. Future research could build on this, exploring the nature of men's social media presence as a determining factor in their understandings and engagement with feminism.

A further area that may be worthy of exploration research would be the role of other men in men's understanding of feminism. Within this study, despite acknowledgement in various interviews that men could be feminists, none of the participants discussed any positive role models or relationships with men as informing their adoption of feminist beliefs or labels. This omission is noteworthy, and perhaps reflects trends in existing literature that detail the tendency for men to be framed as problematic to feminism, and are therefore omitted from feminist discourses (Herbert 2007). Future research could explore this further, perhaps investigating the nature of the relationship between men, their fathers, and their proclivity to engage in social justice. Additionally, given that even the queer men interviewed in this research emphasized

their perspectives that queer men might be more willing to engage with feminism, future research could delve deeper into the reasons why that might be, or explore queer men's perception of heterosexual men's engagement with feminism.

Closing reflection

Ultimately there are any number of future avenues for research exploring the nature of the relationship between men and feminism. I am unable to comment or summarize the entirety of them in this thesis, however one thing that has stood out to me as I have continued to work on this thesis has been the argument put forth by Herbert (2007) regarding the way feminist research and rhetoric may discourage men from participation. Herbert states that if the only way that men exist within feminist rhetoric is as oppressive actors, the invisibility of men as feminist allies perpetuates the loudest voice in the room, linking men as synonymous with patriarchal oppression (32). In doing so, not only do feminists inadvertently reinforce essentialist ideas of women, but also reduce the potential for men to engage as feminists, forming what Herbert refers to as "trans-gender allegiances", which would be in the direct interest of all who are marginalized within the patriarchy (33). Herbert states that there is a need for a shift in research, moving from a concern of whether men might be "engaging in feminist practices out of self-interest, towards a concern with what self-interest we have in recognizing men as feminist allies." (43). The result of this would liberate folks from attempting a "one-size-fits-all" model for engaging men in feminism, and would instead be mindful of the socio-cultural, political, and economic factors that might influence engagement (42), a statement that feels inherently aligned with the core values of feminist research as outlined by scholars such as Haraway (1988), and Harding (2018).

An element of remaining reflexive through this research process has required me to contemplate the ways that I intentionally or inadvertently reproduce messaging about feminism and the role of men within it, messaging that was repeated back to me time and again during interviews. The men that I interviewed commonly expressed a desire to engage in feminism “the right way,” often linking this to being a “good person,” or expressed anxiety about the potential to make a mistake in attempting to behave “like a feminist.” While some of these statements might appear performative or self-protective, there is truly no way to know the exact intention behind these sentiments. Instead, I interpreted these statements as reflections of participants willingness to engage with feminism, as these men demonstrated through their answers the ability to conceptualize oppression broadly in society, yet also seemed uncertain about their role in addressing this oppression. Considering the argument put forth by Herbert (2007) and her summary of the existing tensions in feminist literature about “the man question,” it is unsurprising that men lack a clear answer about their role in feminism given that feminists themselves also lack the same answer. Instead of pursuing a concise and conclusive answer to the question of how men ought to engage with feminism, perhaps if future feminist research, literature and activism instead prioritized the deconstruction of harmful manifestations of masculinity, while still building on the positive dimensions as put forth by Bryson (1999), there will instead be opportunities to create the “trans-gender allegiances” proposed by Herbert (2007). In doing so, rather than abandon concerns with equal rights for women and others marginalized within the patriarchy, there will instead be a more nuanced understanding of the ways that the social construction of femininity, masculinity, and other such characteristics reinforce hegemonic hierarchies. It is my hope that this thesis has contributed to such a dialogue rather than reinforce

essentialist beliefs about men and women, pro and anti-feminist beliefs, and that the information summarized here will be helpful for others hoping to explore similar research topics in the future.

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HONORARIUM

SEEKING
RESEARCH
PARTICIPANTS!

ARE YOU A MAN ENROLLED AT UVIC?

We are seeking participants to engage in a conversation about men's perspectives on feminism. Interviews will be approximately 1-hour and held virtually or in-person in Victoria (location dependent).

Participants must be:

- A self-identified man
- 18-25 years old
- Enrolled at University of Victoria

CONTACT

FOR INQUIRIES OR ANY QUESTIONS!

THIS RESEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED BY MOLLY HEANEY-CORNS TO FULFILL A SOCIOLOGY MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT. THIS RESEARCH IS UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF DR. STEVE GARLICK WHO CAN BE CONTACTED AT

APPENDIX B



**University
of Victoria**

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

<p>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Steve Garlick (Supervisor)</p> <p>PRINCIPAL APPLICANT: Molly Heaney-Corns Master's student</p> <p>UVIC DEPARTMENT: Sociology SOCI</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #e1eef6;">ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER</td> <td style="text-align: right;">22-0721</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="font-size: small;">Expedited review - delegated</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">27-Jun-2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td>APPROVED ON:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">27-Jun-2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td>APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">26-Jun-2024</td> </tr> </table>	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER	22-0721	Expedited review - delegated		ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	27-Jun-2023	APPROVED ON:	27-Jun-2023	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	26-Jun-2024
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<p>PROJECT TITLE: Young men's perception of Feminism</p> <p>RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None</p> <p>DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None</p> <p>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: <small>tpps2_core_certificate (1).pdf - 10-Mar-2023 Thesis resource sheet.pdf - 23-May-2023 Recruitment poster.pdf - 24-May-2023 Draft interview guide thesis.docx - 24-May-2023 MA consent form version 2.doc - 21-Jun-2023</small></p>											
Conditions of approval											
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p>Amendments To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.</p> <p>Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p>Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>											
Certification											
<p>This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Dr. Sandra Gibbons Chair, Human Research Ethics Board</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Dr. Matthew Murphy Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board</p> </div> </div>											

Certificate Issued On: 27-Jun-2023

APPENDIX C



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Young men's perception of feminism in Victoria, British Columbia

Researcher(s): Molly Heaney-Corns, Graduate Student, University of Victoria.

Supervisor: Dr. Steve Garlick, Professor of Sociology at the University of Victoria.

Purpose and Background:

This research study looks to explore how young men currently understand and engage with feminism in Victoria, British Columbia in an effort to contribute to literature examining how different generations of men have engaged with feminism. This study is being conducted as part of Molly's Master's Thesis and the findings will be utilized for the completion of their degree.

Voluntary Participation:

You have been selected for this interview as you indicated your interest in participating to share your perspective on feminism and social activism as a student in Victoria, British Columbia. Your participation in this research must be entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences or further explanation. You may skip over any interview questions or end the interview at any time, without reason or justification. The success of this study is not contingent upon you and will not be impacted negatively by you withdrawing consent.

Compensation

A small honorarium of \$15 per participant will be provided at the conclusion of the interview in the form of a prepaid gift card to Amazon or Starbucks. If you choose to remove your data or withdraw from the study at any time during or after the interview, this will have no effect on the honorarium provided and you may still keep the \$15 in recognition of your time and energy and contribution to the research.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. I will ask to see your Uvic OneCard to confirm your current enrolment at the University of Victoria, as per the research criteria. To maintain confidentiality, I will not record your V-number. The interviews will take roughly 45 minutes to 1 hour. We will conduct the interview either in-person in an agreed-upon location or if you prefer, via telephone on the University of Victoria's Zoom platform. With your permission, the interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. The interviews will include questions such as:

1. How would you describe your current gender identity and sexual orientation?
 - What are your pronouns?
2. What is your perception of the role of feminism in our current society?
 - What are some examples of feminism in our current social world?

Please note Zoom servers are located in United States of America and Zoom stores users' names and usage data. No other information is stored outside of Canada and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers. As such, there is a possibility that information about you that is gathered for this research study may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government, in compliance with the U.S. Freedom Act.

Benefits:

The primary benefit to participating in this study is knowing that you are helping to advance knowledge on how men perceive their inclusion in feminism and social activism.

Risks:

You may experience fatigue, stress, or emotional or psychological discomfort when speaking about your experience during the interview process. If that is the case, please know that you can opt to not answer certain questions. You can also decide to drop from the study without any consequences or having to provide a reason at any point in the process.

Withdrawal of Participation:

Your participation in this study must be entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences or further explanation. You may skip over any interview questions or end the interview at any time, without reason or justification. The success of this study is contingent upon you and will not be impacted negatively by you withdrawing consent.

Withdrawal of Data:

You can request that your data be withdrawn from the study by contacting Molly Heaney-Corns by email (mollyhea@uvic.ca). Upon request, Molly will delete your data from the study. However, it is impracticable, if not impossible, to withdraw data from results that have been published or otherwise disseminated.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published reports, Molly will not include individual information that would make it possible to identify individual participants. Research data and records will be stored securely and only Molly will have access to these records. Research data will be protected and appropriately encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality. Audio recordings will be accessible only to Molly Heaney-Corns and will be destroyed following transcription and analysis. The actual transcriptions will be secured as noted above.

Disposal of Data:

All electronic data will be stored on Molly Heaney-Corns' password protected laptop and then uploaded into the University of Victoria's University Systems personal home file storage for 3 years. Data will be deleted from the UVic VPN by technology support analysis after this 3-year period.

Dissemination:

Research findings will be disseminated in the primary applicant, Molly Heaney-Corns, MA Thesis. Before the findings are shared with community organizations or beyond the MA Thesis, Molly will reach out to you and, if you are interested, will explain how the findings may be shared with your community and to hear your feedback on that process. Findings may then also be disseminated in published journal articles, community reports, media presentations, or conference presentations.

Questions or Concerns:

If you have any questions or concerns about participation in this study, please contact Molly Heaney-Corns at [REDACTED]. If you would like to talk to Molly's supervisor, you can contact Dr. Steve Garlick at [REDACTED]. If you would like to talk to someone other than the research team, you may contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.