MEN IN FEMINISM: THE MALE FEMINIST

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2019
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

Despite men’s involvement in feminism and their roles within feminist movements having been well researched, men’s lived experiences as self-identified feminists have received limited attention within the academy. Drawing on qualitative data collected from interviews with eleven men, this study explores the motivations that lead men to identify as feminists or become involved in feminist movements and the accounts they give of being a male feminist. Findings indicate that men’s choices to identify as feminists involve a continual negotiation of male privilege and power and that some men’s identification with feminism connects to their intersectional understanding of their own complex social positioning. This research examines this complexity through a discussion of how participants came to identify as feminists, what being a feminist means to them, and how they articulate their own ways of doing feminism. This study argues that attempts to engage men more actively in feminism will only become possible if we first understand the motivations of male feminists and that male feminism is a constant negotiation between recognising male privilege and understanding female subjugation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Gregory Noble and Doctor Penelope Rossiter for supporting me through this journey and not giving up on me. You have both been an inspiration to me and have consistently believed in me even when I didn’t believe in myself. Thank you to Dominique Spice at GRS for all the amazing work you do to help the research students. The Master of Research degree would not be possible without all your hard work and support throughout the whole process and I admire and respect you in the highest of regards. To my partner Kerryn Waters, thank you for supporting me and keeping me strong throughout this degree – I am the luckiest person alive to have you. Thank you to my parents Pieter and Mary Kleynjan, and my brother Mark, my sister-in-law Kerry and my nephew Brooke. I love you all dearly - thank you for your love and support. A special shout out to my close friends Donna Nichols, Gabby Radnan & Nick Cooper who have helped me along the way. I could never have completed this thesis without the care of my medical practitioners, Dr Baker, Dr Chai, Dr. Cameron, Dr. Chen, Dr. Seah, Erin Helleur and Kristy Edwards – thank you all. To all my family and friends in Australia and overseas, you kept me going, would not let me quit, picked me up and guided me – I love you all, thank you.

Last but by no means least, I’d like to thank the men who generously gave up their time to be participants in this research – thank you gentlemen, it was an honour and a pleasure.
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INTRODUCTION

Despite men’s involvement in feminism and their roles within feminist movements having been well researched, men’s own experiences as self-identified feminists have received limited attention within the academy. Men who have been involved in feminism and feminist movements have been described as pro-feminist, women’s rights activists, gender rights activists, egalitarians or equalists, though rarely identified as male feminists (Gaag 2014). Researchers have examined men’s roles in feminism but there is limited research on men’s own motivations and experiences as self-identified feminists. Without understanding what draws men to feminism, it is extremely difficult to attract other men to feminism and help alleviate gender inequality. Drawing on qualitative data collected from interviews with eleven men, this study explores the motivations that lead men to identify as feminists or become involved in feminist movements and the accounts they give of being a male feminist. This thesis explores the central questions of why and how some men identify as feminists. This research examines this complexity through a discussion of how participants came to identify as feminists, what being a feminist means to them, and how they articulate their own ways of doing feminism.

Chapter 2: Becoming a Male Feminist discusses the complex sets of events and relationships that influence men on their journey to becoming feminists. The idea of a male feminist identity is rather complex and the road to feminism is determined by multiple interconnecting systems of power and subjectivities, guided by role models, mentors and life changing events. An important part of the analysis was to examine the narratives through the framework of intersectionality theory. Collins and Bilge (2016) describe intersectionality as follows;
When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves (p. 11).

Although only some of the participants referred to intersectionality explicitly, it nonetheless helped when it came to making sense of the data. Most of the men do understand they identify with intersectionality and its “critical perspectives on the complex interrelations of gender, race, class and sexuality” (Tarrant 2009, p. 13). The concept of intersectionality allows the participants to see themselves as privileged in some ways and disadvantaged in others. In identifying as feminists, the participants must continually negotiate between privilege and subordination. They understand becoming a feminist puts them in a position where they must constantly critique the own privilege, learn from it and adapt accordingly. Intersectionality will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 1: Literature Review and in Chapter 3: Being a Male Feminist. Some participants expressed anxiety about getting feminism wrong by not considering the ways in which some of what they say and do negatively affects women. They also worry that their behaviours may accidently reaffirm dominant hegemonic values. Subsequently, they very carefully avoid what they consider could be construed as anti-feminist behaviour or language, preferring to be made aware if they do exhibit such behaviour.

In order to identify as a feminist, men must first have some sense of what being a feminist means. Chapter 3: Being a male feminist discusses the participants’ perceptions of feminism and their understandings of how they position themselves within feminism. There are many forms of feminism, each with its own definition, and there is no general consensus or indisputable definition of what male feminism is, nor agreement about how men need to behave to explicitly be feminists. The participants’ ideas of feminism and their positioning in
relation to that is for the most part shaped by explicit and implicit perceptions of what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ feminism are. The men do understand there are different forms of feminism and most of them especially reject radical feminism – which is interesting since radical feminism rejects the idea of male feminists. However, it is important to note that feminism in all its form is “a political perspective that uses gender to critically analyse power” (Tarrant 2009, p. 3). For this reason, the men must self-evaluate their own privilege and power as men who identify as feminists. Male feminism is a complex balancing of masculine power as reflected in their involvement within feminist movements. This chapter argues that the many ways in which the participants position themselves within feminism is a reflection on how they relate to power more broadly, as it privileges them while it at the same time disadvantaged them.

**Chapter 4: Doing Male Feminism** discusses how men actively engage in feminism.

When discussing their roles as feminists, most of the participants explicitly make a distinction between two types of ‘doing feminism’ – ‘active’ and ‘passive’. The men described active feminism as when they are required them to be visibly creating and developing social change. This involved public political activism, as well as professional teaching in the fields of feminist theory or gender studies, and instructing people on how to be what Daniel calls “pro-social bystanders”. Daniel is referring to “bystander intervention” (Pease 2015, p.60), where people learn ways of intervening when domestic violence and violence against women is occurring before them. Passive feminism, on the other hand, is done away from public scrutiny and is described by the participants as working in the background through listening, learning and informally educating men within their social circles by challenging sexism and misogyny. Above all, most of the participants believe that doing feminism requires empathy. However, this empathy must result in men responding proactively as an ethical imperative to support women. Kaplan (2011) refers to this empathetic response as ‘witnessing’, the subjugation of women and then acting upon it. The participants believe empathy is the only
way men can try to understand what hurdles women face in their everyday lives. This chapter argues that men must be actively involved in feminism but in doing so, they must recognise their position in feminist movements and resist any desire to take over.

For feminism to succeed in creating gender equality, it needs to involve men. Attempts to engage more men actively in feminism will only be possible if we first understand the motivations, challenges, rewards and emotions that drive men away from hegemonic masculinities and on to counterhegemonic practices. This study will contribute to the growing knowledge of men’s involvement in feminism by directly asking those men who identify as feminists, why they do so and what it means to them. This thesis argues that men’s self-positioning in feminism is a constant cycle of learning and adopting changes in feminist ideologies and, more specifically, identifying as a male feminist is a continual negotiation of gendered power and difference.
CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism and women’s movements have had a long history of challenging the inequalities and discrimination against women (Hebert 2007; Rowbotham 2010; Tarrant 2009). In the eighteenth century, proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft powerfully argued that women’s ‘characters’ were no more than a social construction and women’s autonomy would benefit all of society (Hannam 2012; Wollstonecraft 2010). Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights for Women*, 1792, is considered a founding text of feminism that “influenced the development of feminist thought” (Hannam 2012, p. 98). In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill was an early male advocate of modern feminism. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill (1869) argued that “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (pp. 38-39). Women’s ‘nature’ is an effect of social construction (Tarrant 2009).

Since then, feminism has historically developed through various forms, or ‘waves’, of social theory and activisms that has allowed feminism to remain strong and relevant within the male dominated societies that it challenges (Harnois 2012; Powell 2013; Tarrant 2009). ‘First Wave’ feminism, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, sought rights for women to participation in socio-political processes (Bibby 2016; Tarrant 2009). Suffragettes of the first wave fought for the right to stand for parliament as well as the vote, the abolition of slavery, inequities in education, to name a few key issues (Tarrant 2009). Some men actively supported this (Baily 2015; Mill 1869).

‘Second Wave’ feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was also supported by some men, who actively participated in women’s movements, or formed men’s groups (Baily 2015). Feminist separatist groups responded to men’s involvement by demanding women-only spaces (Tarrant 2009). Men’s separatist groups responded in kind with male-only bonding activities which allowed them to “explore their sense of constriction and the ways in which
they were stuck in rigid gender roles” (Tarrant 2009, p. 54). Second wave feminism fought the idea that politics was solely concerned with the public sphere, arguing that the personal is also political, asserting that sexual relations, sexual orientation, the body, abortion, domestic labour, child care and reproduction are also political issues (Lloyd 2008). This wave of feminism was extremely diverse and, Tong (2007) argues that three of its movements dominated; ‘liberal feminism’, ‘radical feminism’, and ‘Marxist–socialist’ feminism. Second wave liberal feminism took the view that women’s subordination to men is a social construction of gender identities, used to justify the confinement of women to the private realm, and limiting their access to the public world (Tong 2007). Second wave radical feminists believed women would never be equal to men until they had control over “their own reproductive powers and sexual pleasures” (Tong 2007, p. 26). They believed that “no matter how much educational, political, and economic equality women achieve, nothing fundamental will change for women so long as women’s reproductive role remains the same” (Tong 2007, p. 26). Second wave ‘Marxist–socialist’ feminists focussed on class and argued women were positioned within interlocking systems of oppression;

Second-wave Marxist–socialist feminists were struck by [radical feminism’s] relative (or total) neglect of matters related to class status. They noted that although it is true that women in capitalist patriarchies occupy a subordinate position relative to men on account of their sex, this does not mean that all women are equally oppressed. In terms of one’s total oppression, it may be worse to be a poor man than a rich woman in capitalist patriarchy (Tong 2007, p. 28).

Some feminists in the second wave considered men’s involvement problematic (Baily 2015). While liberal and Marxist-socialist feminists see “no inherent or inevitable conflict of interest between men and women” (Bryson 1999, p. 196), second wave radical feminists argued that patriarchy is not just a system of inequality but one of hierarchical male power and female oppression in which men control “women’s sexual and reproductive lives and
women’s self-identity, self-respect, and self-esteem” (Tong 2014, p. 51). Men did work alongside women in the second wave as pro-feminists, for instance (in the USA) in the National Organisation for Women (NOW), though they never took up or strived for leadership positions (Mackay 2015). Unfortunately, some actions by radical feminists have left a stigma that makes white men specifically want to avoid feminism. As hooks (2015) argues, “I tend to hear all about the evil of feminism and the bad feminists: how “they” hate men; how “they” want to go against nature – and god; how “they” are all lesbians; how “they” are taking all the jobs and making the world hard for white men.” (p. xi).

In truth, these myths about radical feminism are built from third-hand knowledge (hooks 2015), yet the stigma remains and so, even when they understand that feminism has multiple movements, people are reluctant to identify as feminists in case that stigma is applied to them (Wiley, Srinivasan, Finke, Firnhaber & Shilinsky 2012). For some men, there is also the added fear of being seen as effeminate if they identify as feminists (Conlin & Heesacker 2017; Gundersen & Kuntz 2012; Precopio, R & Ramsey, L 2012; Rudman, Mescher & Moss-Racusin 2012; Wiley et al. 2012) because it puts in jeopardy their place and value within a patriarchal society and challenges male gendered power. hooks (2015) argues that this is a major factor in why it is difficulty to attract men to feminism. However, while men benefit from patriarchy and power, hooks (2015) believes most men find patriarchal expectations challenging and are disturbed by poor treatment of women. According to hooks (2015) the biggest challenge in attracting men to feminism is getting men to let go of patriarchal benefits.

In the late eighties and early 1990s, a ‘Third Wave’ of feminism occurred, which was made public with its connection to female punk music, driven by the Riot Grrrl movement and Grrrl power (Turner 2001, p. 22). Included in the third wave was the feminist theory of intersectionality, where gender inequalities cannot be understood outside of how they
intersect with experiences, social positioning and relations of power based on other significant axes of social difference including race, sex, class and sexual orientation (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson 2013; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013; Collins & Bilge 2016; Garcia 2016; Lloyd 2008: Peretz 2017; 2018; Tong 2014). Intersectionality as a theory and analytical tool is always expanding as a continual work in progress because of the complexity of the relations to power and the context in which it is applied (Carbado et al. 2013). First introduced by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Carbado et al. 2013; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 2013; Garcia 2016), who used the term to describe the discrimination of African-American women in the US legal system, which states they must be categorised as either an African-American person or a woman but does not recognise them as both (Garcia 2016). Intersectionality is a way of analysing the organisation of such uses of power to better understand multiple axes of gendered social differences, rather than a simple binary of men and women (Collins & Bilge 2016; Maclaran 2015). Intersectionality is a study of multiple forms of oppression and the experiences of privilege and marginalisation (Childs & Hughes 2018).

In addition, there is now the advent of a ‘Fourth Wave’ of feminism, which takes feminist movements onto the internet through social media platforms (Maclaran 2015). Concurrently, the internet’s global interconnectivity has produced a vast increase in men involved in feminist movements (Baily 2015; Feasey 2017; Hamad & Taylor 2015; Stache 2015). Men self-identifying as feminists in the third and fourth waves are assisted by a growth in gender equity initiatives that focus on advocating for gender equality and the equal sharing of ‘gender roles’ as a joint responsibility of the public and private spheres (Baily 2015; Connell 2013; Murgia & Poggio 2009), male violence against women (Flood 2014; Flood 2015; Pease 2015; Peretz 2017; 2018) and a demand for shared parental leave (Murgia & Poggio 2009). There is also the initiative of ‘bystander intervention’ courses that teach
men how to react when witnessing violence against women (Pease 2015). Traditional roles for men are now being scrutinised by men themselves as they reject unhealthy and out-dated ways of being a man, such as reacting with violence, the idea men have a prescribed social power over women and the restrictions placed on them as men and what being a man means (Gaag 2014). With a growing amount of men wanting to sever the ties they have to traditional masculinities, it is essential to study men, masculinities and the relationship men have with contemporary feminism and campaigns for gender equality (Conlin & Heesacker 2017; Hannam 2012; Hebert 2007; Holmgren & Hearn 2009).

There is a wealth of literature on men’s gendered practices, masculine identities, and the social processes that construct and position men within male-dominated gender hierarchies, referred to by Connell as hegemonic masculinities (Crawford & Pini 2010; Connell 2014; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinities allow men positions of privilege and power in a way that seems natural, even as it disadvantages some men, whilst positioning women as inferior (Connell 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinities are “patterns of practice”, such as violence against women and the “global subordination of women”, “that allows men’s dominance over women to continue”, as well as the subordination of other forms of masculinity (p. 832). Hegemonic masculinities are not ‘naturally’ possessed by men but are socially constructed in relations between men and women, as well as other men (Messerschmidt 2018) and are legitimised through male practices of power (Flood 2015).

Messerschmidt recently reformulated this concept to “distinguish “hegemonic masculinities” from “dominant,” “dominating,” and “positive”” forms of masculinities (Messerschmidt & Messner 2018, p. 41). Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) argue that dominant masculinities are the most celebrated or common masculinity in a society or culture; dominating masculinities control and exercise power over people and events; and
positive masculinities legitimate “egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (p. 42). In short, dominant masculinities are the most desired characteristics men strive for within hegemonic masculinities, dominating masculinities are those who “call the shots”, and positive masculinities are those who take on counterhegemonic work alongside disadvantaged groups (Messerschmidt & Messner 2018). As a social movement contesting the power of hegemonic masculinities and dominant and dominating masculinities, feminism is an ethico-political perspective for men who believe in gender equality (Baily 2015; Holmgren & Hearn 2009). These men often contest or undermine hegemonic masculinities and take up counterhegemonic practices (Flood 2014; Messerschmidt 2018) “that critique, challenge or actually dismantle hegemonic masculinities” (Messerschmidt 2018, p. 142). These practices may include taking on anti-violence activism and other social justice ideals (Flood 2014).

There is an abundance of international research on men’s involvement in social activism in relation to gender equity (Baily 2015; Conlin & Heesacker 2017; Gaag 2014; Holmgren & Hearn 2009; Salah & Wernli 2016; Tarrant 2009; Wolf 2015). In the Australian context, such research remains scant. This literature identifies key or common areas of focus in men’s orientation to feminism. Research has shown that most men want to help fight against violence done to women and girls (Flood 2011; Pease 2104; Tarrant 2009). They want shared parenting roles and seek paternity leave, so they can spend time with their children (Kimmel 2015; Murgia & Poggio 2009). Men are also motivated by the women in their lives (Pease 2014). Barrett (2013) argues “everybody has a woman in their life that they love and respect; be it their mother, sister, partner, daughter, niece or friend. To show that you care about these women is to support efforts to improve their quality of life, opportunities and well-being” (para. 37). Flood, Russell, O’Leary and Brown (2017) extends upon this by stating “the quality of every man’s life depends to a large extent on the quality of those
relationships. Men gain when the women and girls around them have lives which are safe and fair” (p. 9). In order to gain, men need to address the attitudes and practices of men that contribute to violence against women (Flood 2014).

Many men are just not aware of the gender inequalities that exist in contemporary Australia (Flood et al, 2017). Australian women still earn 8.2 percent less than men in the workforce; one in three Australian women fifteen years and over have experienced physical violence at the hands of men and one in five have experienced sexual assault, and in 2014 one in two mothers reported workplace discrimination during pregnancy, maternity leave, or on return to work (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). These are but a few of the issues women face, but there are also some issues that men face under the patriarchal system. One in eight Australian men suffers from depression and finds it difficult to seek help because “they think they're supposed to be tough, self-reliant, able to manage pain and take charge of situations” (Beyond Blue 2016, para. 1). Learning more about what drives men to feminism can help identify ways of improving the lives of people of all sexes, though admittedly this thesis concentrates only on two.

However, there is much suspicion and scepticism about the credibility of men being feminists (Baily 2015; Crowe 2011; Hebert 2007; Holmgren & Hearn 2009). From the perspective of radical feminism, the concept of patriarchy implicates men as habitually maintaining their self-interests and positions of power (Baily 2015). They argue that men lack the lived experience that allows them to understand female oppression (Baily 2015; Hebert 2007), so that even when men advocate for women’s equality, they still continue to dominate the workforce and expect domesticity from their partners (Connell 2005). Women are also the victims of appalling rates of domestic violence, making it very difficult to trust men’s sincerity (Flood 2011). Contemporary research into male feminism is predominantly from women’s perspectives (Baily 2015) or focuses on whether men are more active in
gender reform if they identify as feminists (Conlin & Heesacker 2017). Men who actually call themselves feminists remain under-examined (Baily 2015; Conlin & Heesacker 2017; Holmgren & Hearn 2009). Contemporary researchers argue that there is a distinct lack in literature and research on the topic and believe there is a need for much more research in this area (Baily 2015; Conlin & Heesacker 2017; Holmgren & Hearn 2009). Baily (2015) researched men’s involvement in mixed feminist groups in the UK; Flood (2018) and Pease (2018) have done extensive studies on men’s involvement in antiviolence initiatives; There have been numerous academics who have written on men’s involvement in feminism (Gaag 2014; Tarrant 2009, Wiley et al. 2012). There is a distinct lack of research on men self-identifying as feminists from the perspective of those men. By directly asking men who identify as feminists what drives them towards feminism, this research will add to the growing literature on men as self-identified feminists. This study focuses on the narratives of male feminists to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and to the central question of why some men call themselves feminists.
CHAPTER 2. BECOMING MALE FEMINISTS

Introduction

There are many factors that influence men on their road to feminism, and they are extremely complex in nature. For some of the participants in this research, the journey started at a young age, but for others it involved a ‘life-changing moment’. For instance, Chris’s life-changing moment was witnessing the 2014 mass killing by Elliot Rodger\(^1\), whose actions and attitudes towards women is so shocking that Chris felt he needed to identify as a feminist in a show of solidarity with women. Bailey’s life-changing event happened when he met his now wife, a feminist herself. Before that, he had never had “a serious relationship” and had not “like talk to women that much before” he met his wife, who introduced him to feminism and male privilege. Pease (2015) argues that if men are to be involved in feminism, there must be a focus on what drives men’s relational interests. By following men’s paths to feminism, it is possible to see how they construct those interests as they relate to feminism and women in general. The participants demonstrate that an important part of identifying as a male feminist is through their understanding of the path they took to become a male feminist.

This chapter will address three main themes, focusing on the ways the participants’ feminist identities are developed through multiple interconnecting systems of power (Collins and Bilge, 2016). The journeys the men have taken through critiquing this power, through their relation to feminism, have helped them to challenge dominant and dominating hegemonic gender ideologies, as well as develop more positive ideologies. The first major theme that arose from the data is the way participants’ journeys were influenced by their relations to family, education or life-changing events and how those accounts revealed

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\(^1\) Elliot Rodger, aged 22, was the perpetrator of the virgin homicides on May 23 2014, his ‘Day of Retribution’. He left seven dead, including himself, and 14 injured (Rosdahl, 2014; Vito, Admire and Hughes, 2018).
connections to gendered relations of power. The first section of the chapter presents a case study of Rick, whose experiences were the most elaborate and diverse of all the men. Rick’s distinct awareness of the various relations that he felt affected his journey reveals the way in which a complex set of events and relationships draw men into thinking more about gender and how it relates to power.

The second section discusses the participants’ resistance to dominant hegemonic masculinities, both as a result of feeling subjugated by them, as well as an evolving awareness of gender privilege and the subordination that patriarchies enforce onto women and men. The participants argue that they were made inferior through acts of violence, abuse and accusations of ‘virtue signalling’ (an accusation of being hypocritical about wanting to be thought of as good in order to gain social praise; McClay 2018). They feel this allows them to see difference more readily and could thus identify with the gendered subordination of women to some degree because of these negative experiences. This also equates to them constantly critiquing their own behaviour to prevent themselves from acting in a way that reinforces male privilege. The participants resistance to patriarchy is an important step in men’s journeys to feminism because it highlights their struggle in where they occupy their own position as men.

The third section addresses the anxiety the men feel in critiquing their own privilege in order to develop their feminism. The participants are aware that some women have suffered sexual violence done by men, and so as a man, they themselves may be a trigger in causing further mental harm to a woman. The participants argue that men in feminism will make mistakes, they will get it wrong along the way, and they should be held accountable for it. However, they also think their relation to feminism is a continual learning curve and they should be made aware of their mistakes so that they can own them, learn from them, and improve themselves as feminists.
Role Models, Mentors and Life-Changing Moments

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the way in which participants viewed their journey to feminism as being influenced by family relationships, educational experiences, as well as life-changing events, and how these accounts also revealed particular connections to gendered relations of power. The influences the men speak of were not necessarily associated with feminism per se, but the participants still recognised them as important contributors that helped develop their feminist identities. Rick, for instance, reasoned that his feminism was developed through association with strong and powerful women. I asked him if he felt this may be a common theme for men in feminism; “I think it’s more specific to myself, but I think, most importantly, having a strong female role model is just as important shaping the values a young man has in his adolescence, as having a strong male role model.” Rick spoke often about role models that affected his journey to feminism. When asked why he initially identified as a feminist, Rick immediately connected his journey to his mother.

I think it’s got to do with the fact that I had a very strong role model in my mother […] my mother was always more educated than my father. She always earnt more money than him as well. But she always, I guess, fulfilled that role and that duty, being of Indian background as that traditional, you know, person that looks after the family home and so forth, but, I always found that she was very strong. Now, she was the first woman in her whole entire village to actually seek; (A) a tertiary education, (B) leave her village, (C) break down this whole notion of marrying someone who was chosen by her parents […] So, for a person that had that strength to break all those precepts and yet still, you know, persevere, I think that really is one of the reasons why I identify as a feminist – as well, is that I’ve got two elder sisters. They’re both about ten and twelve years older than myself, and I guess that also had a big role in making me a feminist.
Rick does not present his mother as a feminist at all, but instead she is portrayed as a powerful role model who overcame adversity. Connecting with his mother, as well as his much older sisters, has guided his ideologies and first steps to feminism. As he observed during the interview, “I kind of latched on more to mum and her, kind of, philosophy and she was a very strong person.” His mother is an inspiration to him, someone who demonstrates that traditional ideologies and gender roles can be challenged and changed. Two other participants, John and Albert, had similar relationships with their mothers. When describing his home life, Albert told me “I was a huge mumma’s boy [and] I did have, they’ve kind of eased up a little bit, two very overbearing sisters.” John was late to feminism, he “first identified as a feminist, I think, in 2012. […] it's not an identity that I have identified with all my life.” When I asked him if he may have had any female role models that had him thinking about feminism at a younger age without him even realising, he replied;

Well one good thing about female role models is both my Mum and my sister are actually really good examples of that, in a passive way and in very much a way that is kind of a feminist issue, where I wasn't even aware of how much influence they were having on me.

John’s complacency at a young age is directly related to the typical invisibility of privilege found amongst men within the disciplinary power of hegemonic masculinities. His passivity is a feminist issue “because there was a complete lack of awareness or just taking it for granted, I feel like that was one of my youthful oversights in that regard.” Rick understands the beginning of his journey through a critique of disciplinary power, as expressed in his mother’s defiance of the different rules she and other women face in her home country of India compared to Indian men. Albert’s journey shows more of an understanding of power as an interpersonal connection to his mother, sisters and female friends, understanding his social advantage and women’s disadvantage, commenting “how can you spend an exorbitant amount of time with women and not call yourself a feminist, and
not care about their wellbeing, and not want more for them.” While this statement can imply that men who don’t identify as feminists don’t spend much time with women or care about them, it is a subjective view and should be taken as rhetorical in its intention.

Even though Rick’s mother isn’t identified by him as a feminist, she still demonstrates an ability to disrupt the masculine power structures and cultures of her life, as well as instil that same resolve in her children. He also briefly touched on the influence of his own two sisters, admiring them for their capacity to resist traditional gender assumptions. When the discussion drifted to sport, Rick mentions;

Both my sisters play netball […] I remember [my] sisters coming back home man, I was like, ‘what happened to you? Did you have a fight with a cat?’, she was like, ‘oh, no, just goal defence was being a, you know, a this and that,’ […] okay, I played footy and I was pretty much, you know, unscathed, so…

The realm of sport has been traditionally geared toward the toughness of men (Connell, 2005). Though women’s representation in sport and the toughness of its sportswomen is finally being recognised, Rick did discover at a young age, through his sisters who demonstrated toughness in sport, that gendered power is not solely the domain of men. This is also evident in the way he describes his traditional Indian culture and the God of War, “her name’s Kali and she, you know, she has the heads of seven demons, with blood dripping down her lips with a sword and dagger. That is the strength of women right there.” It is also evident in the way he refers to as “western suburbs feminism”, which is an intersection of gender and class;

I think feminism in the western suburbs, it starts off as this kind of all, you know, presence of, you know, female figures that are just larger than

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2 Women’s prowess, power, physicality, aggression and injury in contemporary Australian sport can be demonstrated through the promotional videos on netball; https://youtu.be/qUJeab4Y700 and AFLW; https://youtu.be/p1UEy5Lv20U
life, you know, more tough than any man could ever be. [...] Even in politics, I’ve found that a lot of the women that have gotten elected to office from the western suburbs, look they’ve had to be extremely tough. Extremely tough, not only in campaigning, but also in party politics. They’ve had to be, you know, made of steel, almost impenetrable. And, I think one thing of western suburbs feminism, I think of women that, you know, are tougher and more masculine, if I can say that term, more masculine – and when I say masculine, I’m not referring to men, I’m referring to masculine traits, you know, than the blokes around them.

As the quote suggests, female toughness is one of the precursors affecting Rick’s journey. It has also helped him to understand that masculine hegemonies can be disrupted. Gundersen and Kunst (2018) argue that feminists are often negatively stereotyped as masculine and domineering. However, as Rick notes in the above quote, there is a difference between being masculine “like a man” and possessing masculine traits that have been socially construed as masculine. Thus, it is important to note that Rick has interpreted “tough” women, or women who are “made of steel” as being a positive influence on him. Rick’s quotes above describe tough women that challenge the positioning of females in masculine hegemonic social, cultural and political structures. However, the masculinisation he recognises in “western suburbs feminism” and women in mainstream politics as being masculine is not replicated in his depiction of his mother and sisters. Both narratives describe strong women, but women’s power is represented differently between those in the public sphere and those in the private.

These are not the only type of influences Rick identifies with in becoming a feminist. He also looked up to mentors within his educational environments;

Going to a boy’s school and a Catholic school is that, we did have a number of our teachers that were actually [religious] Sisters. [...] You did have this kind of respect towards them. Definite respect towards them and the work they did. [...] I remember the first time that I kind of, you know, started thinking about gender equality or feminism itself was
actually a teacher at my school, it was my English teacher, who is a male, and he was very kind of ardent – he was actually a Catholic Brother […] you know, from the order – and, you know, he was the one that actually pointed [gender equity issues] out and made quite clear where he stands. And it was just a lot easier hearing that from a male.

Rick went to an all-boys Catholic school, not usually an environment that is conducive to developing feminist ideologies. Despite having his sisters, his mum and the Catholic nuns to talk to — all strong role models that he admires, he turns to his male teacher, a Catholic Brother — to explore feminist issues as principles of social justice. While it is not unheard of that people seek out people who are similar to themselves to learn new things, it is problematic that Rick feels it is “just a lot easier hearing it from a male.” This would be a contested issue amongst the different ideologies of feminism, not only for the fact that it reinforces gender stereotypes around male structures of power and the production of knowledge, but also because within patriarchal structures, gender equality involves massive changes in both the public and personal spheres (Connell 2005). Be that as it may, many of the participants do believe that their role in feminism is to talk to other men about it, for that same reason of learning from someone who appears similar to them, and also as a political responsibility that stems from their own privilege.

Another factor that affected Rick’s journey was the life-changing moment of the birth of his niece;

I was about fourteen when my niece was born, and I quickly realised that a lot of the lines and the teasing and the absolute kind of sleaziness, that most adolescent young men have, and occasionally young women, I didn’t want that on my niece as well. I really re-thought about what I was saying, what I was doing, how I was acting as well.

The other boys’ vulgar banter was confronting for Rick, which then made him challenge his own behaviour, and question what it says about him and how it affects others.
The birth of his niece triggered in Rick a greater sense of responsibility towards the way women and girls are treated, along with greater accountability. More than just being about his niece, this demonstrates the ways that some men and boys come to notice gendered relations of power. Rick had to look at his own privilege and his own behaviour based on the unethical behaviour of those around him. It also produced a desire for change.

The life-changing moment experienced by Rick, is something that some of the men share; the moment that they feel has moved them from a simpler belief in gender equality to naming themselves as feminists to describe their own identity. For Stan it is a moment in college and for Chris it is the Elliot Rodger, ‘war on women’, the Isla Vista rampage. It is these points in the journey that show the men are making a more feminist analysis of the world and are confronting, and being confronted by, their own male privilege. Bailey’s confrontation with his male privilege is a good example of that life-changing moment. His exposure to feminism and gender discourse was much later and is a result of starting his first “serious relationship”. His life-changing moment is a result of meeting his now wife “who was definitely a feminist or is still a feminist. [I realised] this actually impacts people’s lives, so I should actually do something with my privilege to impact that. Actually, she probably also introduced me to the idea of privilege as a term and, you know, to like thinking through that kind of stuff.” Like Rick, Bailey’s path to feminism is in part connected to his own realisation of privilege through a relationship with a woman. Unlike Rick, however, Bailey’s path is essentially paved with his academic wife’s feminist analysis of gendered power.

Rick’s detailed discussion of his journey is by no means the only path to feminism. For Stan’s journey, “Marxism came first and it’s really that interest in the question of exploitation and what a just and cooperative society might be.” Looking through the lens of socio-economic inquiry and critiquing class structures, demonstrates Stan’s desire to search for different and hopefully better alternative living structures. For him, feminism is then a
case of “figuring out how to live, how to live with others, how to live as a man who loves and wants to be involved with a woman partner, I think there’s sort of a practical dimension to being, a feminist at this point.” Stan takes a very political approach to becoming a feminist and so he sees it in terms of a quite deeper understanding of power.

Another example of the diversity of the men’s journeys is Daniel’s narrative. He was not brought up as a feminist, he wasn’t part of a feminist household. He began studying two courses on sexual violence prevention and later began teaching it;

It was not until I got really on board and really involved in it and started doing it that I started to come through the woodworks, that what I was doing was very much feminist work and grew from feminist research and feminist literature. So, it was like I got tricked a little bit into being knowledgeable and aware of feminist issues.

Daniel’s discovery is important in that being “tricked” holds some weight. Sometimes men are partaking in and are learning about feminism in ways that they are unaware of. It shows a very significant change from being associated with feminism – growing up in a feminist household – to being educated on and really understanding the inequality a woman faces and the privilege he has.

Although the participants each followed a different path to feminism, the contributing factor they all shared is their relation to gendered power. Rick grew up surrounded by strong women – his mother, sisters, the nuns at school and his idea of western suburbs feminism. He also understood the power of his own privilege. These two intersecting ideas means Rick not only learnt how to challenge the hegemony, but also how to disrupt it. Using Rick as an example to compare and contrast the other participants’ experiences allows us to see that each of the men can demonstrate some knowledge of their privilege as men and develop traits of positive masculinity, which helped to develop their feminism after the initial steps were taken.
Resisting Hegemonic Masculinities

A second theme that surfaced during the interviews is that the participants saw feminism as a social movement that allows them to resist the negative practices of dominant and dominating hegemonic masculinities, as well as actively engage in positive masculinity by helping improve women’s social, cultural and political standing. As noted in the literature review, Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) suggest hegemonic masculinities “legitimate an unequal relationship between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (p. 38), even when they do not endorse it. It is therefore important to examine the relationship the participants have with masculine hierarchies, in order to understand how this affects their personal journeys to feminism.

There are definite feelings of angst towards dominant male power structures and other men’s dominating attitudes and practices towards women, amongst the participants. This has led to their critique and thereby their resistance to patriarchy. Bart’s personal criticism is of what he believes are the attitudes of men who subscribe to dominant hegemonic masculine culture;

What I’m seeing is, more of a lack of empathy, and lack of understanding of the - like, for a women’s lot, from these type of guys. Where they’re like, “I can just see the issues that I have, and if there’s extra attention put on a different structure, then that’s going to be at my detriment, when I already have heaps of shit to deal, and I’ve had a crappy life, and I like, had all these horrible things happen to me.” […] they just cannot fathom that everyone didn’t have the same opportunities as them. […] It’s like, “this is life, I understand life, I go through it every day, so everyone’s clearly doing the same thing.”

His mocking of patriarchal ideology demonstrates a few things. Firstly, he believes those who endorse hegemonic masculinities cannot see the difference between themselves
and those they subjugate. Secondly, he himself can see this difference, which means he can see past the rhetoric. Thirdly, he introduces an ‘us-versus-them’ dynamic in relation to men and feminism. He identifies as a nerd, considered a form of subordinated masculinity. He was treated overly harshly because, “being a sort of a nerd or a geek at school, you were that ostracised underclass.” He was bullied “for being intellectual and not being an alpha male.” Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refer to it as the “sub-ordination of nonhegemonic masculinities” (p. 846). Bart believes this is a key factor in why he engages in feminism. A negative association with dominating cultural behaviours of men has meant he developed a heightened awareness of what it is to be subjugated, which he feels allows him to understand the subjugation of others; “well I can identify with women having a shit run, because I had a shit run, and I know what it feels like.” Bart seems to pinpoint a mutual subjugation with women, for himself at least, that he then incorporates a perception of mutual resistance of hegemonic masculine ideologies, that ultimately led him to feminism;

So, I never saw that as, this is the way that the world should be. Then, if that’s the way it should be, the world’s pretty shitty, and then, so why should anyone be treated like that, whether they’re male or female, or whatever. […] Then that sort of an epiphany in my late 20s, that oh shit, a lot of - like, a whole gender is treated like that all the time. […] Then all of a sudden, it’s - I can be something that previously is just associated with extremists, or sort of political activists or anything like that. It’s like, I believe in something that is different to the status quo, there’s nothing wrong with that, and it does actually align with my world view, for me.

Bart’s feminism stems from him not walking a single normative path of “being a blokey-bloke who plays footy and beats up kids you don’t like.”

There is a language pattern within the narratives of the men who grew up feeling the same oppression by the patriarchy that Bart feels. Bart refers to alpha males as the oppressors. He and Daniel also use the term “hyper-masculine”, Albert refers to the
“exceptionally-masculine”, while Barry refers to “pure-maleness” and the “ultra-male”. This connects back to the us-versus-them mentioned earlier. These words, alpha, hyper, exceptional, and ultra, all point to a pinnacle; they are words that describe the top. Men are expected to reach for that highest version of what it is to be a man and subscribe to it. This fits with Hebert’s (2007) research that argues that all forms of gendering are measured against this dominant pinnacle of masculinity, despite it being extremely rare to find men who actually fit these standards. Barry’s reference to “pure-maleness” connotes that there must exist an impure-maleness, and that is where the participants who resist patriarchal cultures feel they have been placed, or even for some, desire to be placed or identify with. The participants understand that to resist hegemonic masculinities and to become a feminist is to be targeted. Aaron argued that “being a feminist means losing friends. Being a feminist means, uh, being attacked. Being a feminist means, uh, having people call you weak.” While he argued that “these people don’t tend to attack people like me,” most attacks on him are through gaming communities. Bailey reasoned that standing up for women in gaming communities means “having to worry about us getting death threats and worry about us getting abused or losing our jobs or anything for it.” However, the participants understand the difficulties and dangers they might face and still strongly feel it is better to resist than conform, no matter the loss; “the couple of people who I sort of argued with, we’re not friends anymore. I don’t have a problem with that” (Bart).

Becoming a feminist by disassociating from and tackling issues of male violence is also a part of resisting cultures of hegemonic masculinity. It is a very significant and difficult step men take when resisting male power. Rick is an ambassador for the White Ribbon movement, which works to stop violence against women. He stated that in the last year in the Parramatta area alone, “we had close to 3,700-odd calls for domestic violence that were actually attended to. 3,700… you know? This is where we need, you know, more authentic
campaigns that look at feminism.” Rick sees “authentic campaigns” to be grass roots campaigns that deal with violence against women and families, while he sees inauthentic campaigns are ones that are headed by celebrities or are “preaching to the converted”, those already believing in gender equality and feminism. Daniel teaches sexual violence courses. His imperative as a self-identifying feminist is to make men understand what women go through, “one of the biggest challenges I face and because I think one of the biggest areas that men face to understanding sexual violence, is that they struggle to put themselves in the shoes of the woman in the situation and understand how different women's lives are than theirs.”

There is a definite theme of male perpetrators of violence don’t see what feminist men see. This is expounded by men’s rights activist groups (MRAs), who are commonly seen by the participants as having the most unwavering and hateful attitudes towards men who opt for feminism. MRAs are a definite personal and cultural obstacle in the participants’ journeys to feminism. Aaron believes that;

> It’s actually a really difficult thing, because the MRA groups are supporting a culture that already exists. umm, whereas the feminists, or male feminists, or whatever you want to call them groups, are attempting to infiltrate a culture that is the hegemony [...] Those MRA groups that I think are, you know, rife on the internet. You know, like uh, those men are visible, those men are out there making their opinion heard, talking about, you know, men are losing their rights and, you know, all that sort of thing.

According to Tarrant (2009), MRAs go out of their way to disavow any man who claims to be a feminist and avoid any “real information about sexism, unearned privilege, and the institutionalised imbalance of power and authority” to both argue they are facing their own oppression, as well as to conceal their own masculine privilege (p. 113). Aaron refers to this behaviour as what the MRAs call “virtue signalling”,

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And that’s a term that’s designed to take down male feminists. It’s not about females. It’s about males. It’s about our, uh, we’re saying to women, ‘oh, look how great, I’m a male feminist,’ you know, […] It’s, uh, virtue signalling in order to gain popularity. So, they mean I’m saying I have this virtue of being a feminist and that makes me superior to other men, so therefore I should be treated better. I don’t think that’s what most male feminists are doing personally, but that’s the counter argument that’s been raised by that group.

With a mindset unable to progress outside hegemonic normativity, it is arguably difficult for MRA proponents to believe in any motives other than ones concocted within those structures, such as thinking men only use feminism as a platform for self-benefit. Arthur certainly thinks this is the case, “you got the MRAs who I think are having difficulties, or they’re struggling [with] social changes that are being wrought in the world, for better or for worse.” MRA’s are a definite thorn in the side for these men, but it is also a motivator for change. Bart certainly felt that this pushed him in the direction of feminism: - “when I started to discover people who were dabbling in men’s rights activism, in my social circle, and that really pushed the point home that, oh that’s what the other side looks like. That’s what maintaining the status quo looks like, and that’s clearly wrong.” It is difficult to break this status quo, and equally as difficult to change the minds of MRA proponents or tilt men in feminism’s favour, especially when it is new or progressive thinking. It is difficult to break down an ingrained attitude within a male dominated system when such attitudes are considered normal. Aaron mentioned his discovery of this when discussing his own research area. He found it very distasteful when he found that some of his idols held MRA views;

There was a controversy where a woman felt like she’d been - not just felt like, I believe her, but felt like she’d been treated badly by a man in a situation in a conference in Ireland. And, she was attacked not only by general anti-feminist men – MRAs became one of the key groups within that – but she was also attacked by a lot of really big figures in the atheist
community. People like Richard Dawkins and Michael Shermer and these people who I looked up to […] and that was a real turning point for me. It sort of made me think, no, I need to be more open about my feminism. I need to be more clear for in the reasons I am a feminist, and I need to let people know, because I think it’s important to change the hegemony, so to speak.

Aaron felt confronted and so MRAs in this case helped him make a final push towards self-identifying as feminist. Chris had a similar reaction that concluded his journey to becoming a feminist. His pivotal moment of resistance arrived in response to the extreme violence and beliefs of 2014 mass murderer Elliot Rodgers;

I actually started calling myself feminist only - what was it? Three maybe - no, four years ago. In the wake of the - there was a - as there always is, in the wake of a shooting in America and it was one of the ones orchestrated by some guy who felt he’d been jilted by women and I ended up having some quite long conversations with [friends] who were feminists and who were talking about the necessity of feminism [and] realised that I’d always been a feminist, but it helped me to clarify my views and to approach in the right way as well.

Chris was the only participant that mentioned a specific incident of masculine violence as a catalyst to self-identification as a feminist. What is interesting about Chris’ reaction is that Rodgers had a “crisis of masculinity” (Vito, Admire & Hughes 2018, p. 86) where he directed his violence at women and racial minorities because society rejected the way he did masculinity, whereas when Chris was confronted by this act of violence, it sparked some reflexivity about the challenges women face. He sought out feminist friends and realised how bad it can be if men don’t stand up against those attitudes. Being egalitarian

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3 Aaron refers here to Rebecca Watson and Elevatorgate. Watson spoke on sexism at the World Atheist Convention in Dublin, Ireland, June 3rd to 5th, 2011 and was subsequently propositioned in an elevator at 2am in the hotel elevator. She posted a YouTube video discussing the event that started an internet war at https://youtu.be/uKHwduG1Frk. See the original talk at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W014KhaRtik
wasn’t a strong enough position for him after that, so he decided that he needed to identify as a feminist.

Arthur took a different path to dealing with the issue of male violence to women. He addressed it with a moment of self-reflection on how he himself might be considered aggressive and dangerous to women. Flood (2015) argues that men need to critically reflect on their own behaviours if they wish to address male violence against women. Arthur’s experience is that;

I’m a, sort of a, average size bloke, but to a woman, I’m intimidating. So when I’m walking down the street, it’s late at night, this, myself and another woman who doesn’t know me, I make a point of, you know, walking in a non-threatening way, walking in front of the person, or, you know, so they’re not physically intimidated by me. Because, you know, I think of close friends of mine who just have a regular fear, you know, just walking the street, some bloke there. They don’t know who that bloke is and that every bloke has to be considered a threat unfortunately.

Arthur stands just over six feet tall. His reflection shows a keen understanding of both the power a tall, middle class white man can hold, as well as how that can affect women. His comments reflect a feminist ideology in that he puts the onus on himself in checking and changing his behaviour and does not blame or shame the woman for being out alone at night. Making himself less threatening is his job, it is his responsibility.

To the participants of this research, resisting hegemonic masculinities can very well be a turn away from tolerating and accepting physical, mental or implied violence by men. Moving away from hegemonic masculinities was also the result of being put into a subjugated position in a societal structure they did not want to be part of and did not value. These men felt a journey to feminism required a journey away from hegemony or, as Aaron stated, a desire to make a change for the better.
Getting it Right

A point that arose a few times was the participants’ acknowledgement of possibly ‘getting it wrong’ and the anxiety associated with it. Arthur was the first participant to bring this to the fore, sending a follow up email post interview. After he brought this up, I began explicitly asking the rest of the interviewees about this.

Arthur’s email stated;

Further to our discussion tonight, I remembered a point that I wanted to suggest – as a man exploring feminism, I feel a lot like a recovering alcoholic; I’m going to slip up, but if and when I do it’s important to get back on the wagon, and not see one failure as the end of the world. I think we need to be forgiving to men, who are trying to improve themselves, but make mistakes – if we’re not forgiving, when they do make mistakes, if we’re not forgiving, then we will lose them. I don’t see this analogy as being a “get out of jail free card”, but rather a necessity, that many men will need to be supported and encouraged along their journey.

That Arthur took the time to email me, suggests that this is a topic that he feels very strongly about and perhaps has experience in dealing with it himself. Arguing that men need forgiveness and support from other feminists demonstrates Arthur’s awareness of the social conditioning men received under dominant hegemonic masculinities. The quote also might suggest the scrutiny men go through when trying to take on a positive masculinity role against patriarchal norms. That scrutiny comes from both female feminists and by groups such as the MRAs discussed in the previous section. Arthur doesn’t agree that every mistake is forgivable, as is evident in his - ‘it is not a “get out of jail free”’ - comment. This was also a concern for John. When I asked him if men are allowed to make mistakes in the process of becoming a feminist, he replied;
I suppose it depends on the level of the mistake, as well. Unfortunately, our legal system is horrendous when it comes to things like sexual assault, rape, any of those sorts of cases. Those are sort of lines that we really don’t want to see crossed. […] There's a lot of hurt out there and I think that's something for us to be mindful of, […] if somebody gets triggered from having had sexual assault or something like that and just men, unfortunately from that scenario, are the trigger, then as bad as we feel for that experience, we can walk out of that room, we can go home. We can say, well that was pretty awful, frustrating, embarrassing, whatever. But, give it time, it will go. But from the other person's perspective, these are scars that they're carrying.

The important point in here is that John shares Arthur’s opinion that it is okay to make some mistakes and that not all mistakes are terrible, but a male feminist needs to be mindful of how their behaviour and the language they use may affect women, feminist or not. John goes further to suggest that just being a man may trigger something that is affecting the other person. He puts it down to privilege. Men are the beneficiaries of privilege, and so men in feminism must take extreme care in how they interact with women who have suffered at the hands of men.

Chris also believes men have many issues to traverse within feminism, and so making mistakes is inevitable, “there are so many obstacles, making mistakes and accidentally making a faux pas is natural and understandable and I think forgivable.” This is not to say Chris believes it’s okay to keep making those mistakes, that same “get out of jail free card” from Arthur’s comments. Chris suggested;

Of course, they can make mistakes as long as they don’t - every time they’re told by feminists, “well actually no, you’re wrong,” they don’t rebut against it and go, “well I'm a feminist and I think this way.” It’s tough, but you have to be constantly willing to learn and to learn new things and challenge the way you think. Sometimes, that also means
rethinking the feminist stuff you have been taught because it is considered outdated.

Chris’ quote suggests that men who are working towards being feminists must operate within a continual learning cycle on what feminism is. He believes that men can make mistakes, but they should always remain aware of where feminism is going and adjust accordingly.

The final point is that, both Daniel and Bart also feel it is okay to make mistakes, so long as you accept your mistakes and own up to them. Pease (2017) argues that “when men do slip up, it is important for them to acknowledge their missteps without defensiveness.” (p. 23). Daniel spoke of his own learning process;

I've been learning about feminism for five years now and I still feel like I'm somewhat new to it and I'm always - there's some situations where I watch what I say, where I need to be conscious of what I say. I'm fairly new to learning about transgender issues, so that's something where it's totally possible that I'm going to make a mistake or slip up a little bit. I think that as long as people own up to it right away and be open to the fact that they might be wrong, I think that's okay […] but I think everyone's going to make mistakes, especially men.

Daniel demonstrates Chris’ point about constantly learning from your mistakes. However, he takes it a step further to suggest that if a man has to get it right, they need to acknowledge their mistakes and intend to learn from them. Daniel even identifies an area he is still unsure on, by “owning up” to it; his understanding of transgendered people. Bart felt “the one thing that you do need to do, is if someone calls you out, or you identify that yourself made a mistake, is own it, and just take responsibility.” Making mistakes becomes high stakes for men in feminism. There is always the possibility that the wrong mistakes will have an adverse effect on women, which the participants showed an awareness of. By
owning up to it, they feel there is a chance to learning more about feminism and start creating positive experiences for women and for themselves.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed three important factors affecting the participants’ journeys to feminism. The first section argues that men becoming self-identified feminists has an extremely diverse array of influences and demonstrates how those influences involved awareness and the negotiation of gendered power. When those patterns of power are influenced by the women in their lives, they exhibit traits of what Messerschmidt and Messner (2018) call ‘positive masculinity’. Whether those influences come in the form of role models and mentors or life-changing events, the participants reach a moment of clarity, through a life-changing event, where they finally feel they can call themselves feminists. Some grew up surrounded by feminist influences, while others discovered it later in their lives. The section reveals how that complexity demonstrated the multiple connections that the participants have with gendered power.

The second section discussed how the participants continued their journeys with a grainy awareness of and resistance to dominant hegemonic masculinities and the dominating patterns of practice they enforce. Because they do not conform, they feel ostracised and subordinated by “alpha males” and being subordinated within a structure they do not endorse, helped them to recognise and understand the disparities in the way women are treated; as Bart put it, “a whole gender is treated like that all the time.” The participants have faced schoolyard bullying, been accused of virtue signalling, had to worry about death threats, the risk of job loss and abuse, and yet still feel feminism is a better choice than patriarchal societies. This section argued that a journey to feminism can begin with resisting patriarchal
structures and challenging the normalising of gender violence, which also meant men checking their own behaviour and privilege, in a bid to improve the treatment of women.

The third section discusses the participants’ anxiety about making mistakes. The men were aware that getting it wrong could be detrimental to the women they hope to help, and that sometimes they themselves, as men, may be the trigger. They do not want their mistakes to cause any harm to women and hope to learn and grow from mistakes they have made. They also believed that if they don’t get it right, they need to take ownership of those mistakes and seek to amend them. The section demonstrates that men are willing to constantly be learning about and improving their role in feminism as self-identified feminists.

The road to feminism is influenced in many ways. For the participants, it was a continual negotiation of power, weighing where they belonged within hegemonic masculinities with where they belonged within feminism. To become a feminist, men resist the normalisation enforced onto them by patriarchal ideologies, and fight the subordination and violence done to themselves and women both. The participants want to get feminism right and hope to be pulled up on the times they are getting it wrong. To become a self-identifying male feminist is to understand there is no end game in feminism and it will always be a process of learning and adapting to the needs of women.
CHAPTER 3. BEING MALE FEMINISTS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss men’s perceptions of feminism, their self-positioning in relation to feminism and how this affects their relationships with women and other men. The issue of what being a feminist man means hangs, of course, on how men understand feminism. This understanding and the men’s positioning in relation to it, is shaped by explicit and implicit perceptions of ‘good’ feminism. The idea that men can be feminists has, however, been subject to much theoretical and political debate regarding masculine power and body politics. For instance, while Baily (2015) posits that some feminists believe men are mostly invested in sustaining masculine power, while Hebert (2007) argues that some feminists hold on to views that men are naturally prone to violence. The participants of this study demonstrate this simply is not true and there are multiple ways in which men relate to power and difference. Being a male feminist means the participants are in a position of privilege as a male, and a position of subordination by performing counterhegemonic practices. Significantly, this chapter argues that positioning themselves as a male feminist is a reflection on how the participants relate to power as it simultaneously privileges them and disadvantages them.

Men positioning themselves as feminists

The participants were not directly asked to define feminism but instead the data was elicited from discussions about their relationship to feminism. They gave varied interpretations of what they believe feminism to be. As John posits, “there are so many feminisms and there are so many perspectives.” Nonetheless, most interviewees indicate that they believe feminism is about removing systems of power by challenging systems of power.
This means shifting the power away from masculine hegemonies and recognising how that shift affects their own privilege as men. So challenging patriarchy is as much as a critique of themselves as of hegemonic masculinities as a whole. To do this, the participants unanimously agree that men and women must work together. They posit feminism as something that improves the lives of women and men. There is a general consensus amongst the participants that feminism is good for men. To Bart, being a feminist and rejecting the hegemony he feels oppressed by means he can “believe in something that is different to the status quo, there’s nothing wrong with that, and it does actually align with my world view.” However, having a choice to make changes that match his ‘world view’ is not something that is easily afforded to women under similar circumstances and so this needs to be recognised as a product of male privilege. This is one of many invisible privileges that the feminist men face when navigating identity politics amongst female feminists. Importantly, many participants discuss their feminism in terms of the recent interest in questions of intersectionality, demonstrating multiple intersections of power, identity and subjugation. Some of the men describe these connections in detail, showing an awareness of intersectionality and its intricacies. Many of the participants believe radical feminism is a problem for feminism in what they feel is its ability to ‘taint’ the beliefs of many non-feminists as being the only form of feminism.

Albert uses examples of social justice movements to align feminism with other forms of progressive politics. This connects him to socialist feminism, amongst other forms, which Gordon (2016) argues is “a feminism that recognised many vectors of domination, all of
which should be challenged” (p. 342). Drawing upon similarities between Black Live Matter\(^4\) and All Lives Matter and Feminism and terms like equalist\(^5\), Albert claims;

> There are a lot of people who don’t like to use the word feminism, and prefer to use the term equalist. […] If you’re calling yourself an equalist you’re in a sense taking the power away from where it needs to be in the movement. […] It’s the same general idea of the Black Lives Matter movement and then the All Lives Matter movement. […] Yes, all lives do matter, all life is important, and there should be general equality among everyone, but when you go out of your way and say “all lives matter”, you are taking the power away from the thing that is important.”

Albert draws attention to the unequal relations of power that feminist activism exposes. Equalism denotes men and women being treated the same, which denies existing gender inequality. Not liking to use the word feminism is a denial of the need for women to demand gender parity. Treating everybody the same presupposes that equality has already been achieved, men and women exist in symmetry and men and women also experience the same level of disadvantage (Pease 2015). Just like the All Lives Matter movement, which hinders any possible appropriation of racial power by racial minorities, equalism hampers gender equality for women.

Arthur spent his teenage years “in left wing political groups” in Melbourne, his brother was “involved with a group called Resistance in Melbourne” and Arthur is also actively involved online with the feminist activist group Destroy the Joint.\(^6\) This involvement in contemporary feminist discussion means that Arthur is considerably aware of women’s relation of male power. He makes a point to show that he recognises the everyday

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\(^4\) “The Black Lives Matter Global Network is a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” - https://blacklivesmatter.com/

\(^5\) Equalist’ was used by a few of my participants. It’s a term that claims everybody is equal, or should be, no matter their gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.

\(^6\) Destroy the Joint can be found on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/DestroyTheJoint/ and on twitter at #destroythejoint
relations to power that women have to contend with. By proclaiming, “to my mind, most men are just pushing for their own selfish sexual gratification all the time and I really object to the idea that women are just sort of having to fend it off,” he is critiquing societal power relations that puts men’s patriarchal sense of entitlement above women’s rights; in this case, the rights to what happens to their bodies. In fact, many of the men feel being a feminist allows for stronger engagement and support with women’s rights than terms like gender equity, equalism and egalitarianism permit. Chris describes the need to identify as a feminist as;

Putting the emphasis on women and the fact that they are on the whole less equal. […] I guess the reason I say I am a feminist is because that’s clear-cut. It’s not ambiguous, it’s not sitting on the fence or anything like that.

So, identifying as feminist is another way of shifting power relations. The participants see being a feminist as a definite acknowledgement of them supporting and further empowering the feminist movement – it makes them feel their commitment is real. For Chris, identifying as a feminist shows intention rather than ambiguity and draws more attention to the gender inequalities that terms such as equalist and gender equality don’t allow. Bart believes this distinction is necessary to make because “everything is systematically sort of structured to benefit men.” He sees patriarchal privilege as a problem because “everyone being treated the same is effectively skewing away from the status quo because everyone’s not treated the same as it is.” Pease (2014) argues that challenging male privilege is difficult because “it touches on [patriarchal men’s] investment in maintaining their current position” (p. 23). However, Pease (2014) also argues that it is possible for men to recognise their gender privilege, as my participants have, and challenge the reproduction of behaviour that allows an unequal divide between the treatment of men and that of women. The participants show an understanding of these relations of power and identity. Moreover,
they feel that it is a male feminist’s prerogative to use the privilege and power afforded to them for being male over to feminist movements and supporting women.

**Intersectional feminism**

A central dimension of contemporary feminism for the participants is the emphasis on intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that “the events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor” (p. 11). The participants recognise that they are shaped by multiple axes of social division that are influenced by race, gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and class. Chris, for instance, believes his social identity is comprised of a number of axes of power and difference. He describes himself as a cisgender middle class white male living in England, and sees himself as very masculine, which is reflected in his choice of the “masculine” music genre “metal culture” and his “distinct Scandinavian heritage.” While all these axes of power point to Chris being aligned with dominant hegemonic masculinities, he is also positioned within axes of difference that move him away from that. His best friend is non-binary and a pansexual, and the president of the university’s LGBT community, which Chris is involved in as an ally of that community. He also identifies as someone with a mental illness, as well as other non-masculine ways of being. Chris explained that, “the patriarchy has judged that a feminine notion, that only women have feelings or cry.” He recognised several non-masculine traits in himself: he saw himself as being “open and empathetic, I am actually kind of motherly. I think babies are great, I love them and I’m very affectionate towards my friends, to my partner [and] to animals.” There is much more that Chris listed, including pole dancing for exercise and being a nerd. His identity intersects with varying levels of difference or power, which demonstrates the complexity of social identity and how it is developed beyond a single axis of male/female or masculinity/femininity. For instance, he would not feel the need to
clarify why he does pole dancing if it was not already associated with female strippers; he would not have to define what feminine traits he has if they are not already designated female. So, intersectionality allows the men to locate themselves within complex relations of power and difference that extend beyond a simple male/female binary.

John particularly stresses the importance of intersectionality;

The big conversation in feminism right now is intersectionality.
Feminism is going through its own transformation and moving away from white, middle- or upper-class origins. Looking at people of colour, disabilities, trans rights. […] it’s great that that's happening because it's the complexities of the real world and we don't want to leave anyone behind in this process.

John is a cofounder of a grass roots, mixed-gender feminist group in Sydney which connects him to a general network of feminists and feminist organisations. He specifically connects his feminist identity to his generation – Gen Y;

We're completely decimating that whole hierarchical stuff. It's like yeah okay, we don't give a shit what sort of fancy hat you wear. I'm here to do a job and I'll do my job and I'll tell you straight and if you don't like it, I'll leave and I'll find another one.

Much of the way he relates his generation to disrupting hegemonic social structures is echoed through conversations about feminist activism in general. John was predominantly tied to dominant masculinities as a conservative, middle class man from the “very masculine field of engineering” and “took women for granted in my life before having feminist understanding.” Despite that, he identifies himself as not being a “mainstream sort of guy” and “not so much into the sport scene.” John is positioned by, and positions himself in relation to, a complex field of masculinity and power. His Italian-Australian Catholic background ties him to networks of traditionally patriarchal cultures, but his mother also
challenged this by making sure her children shared their chores equally and without gender bias.

When discussing intersectionality with Aaron, an academic - who also identifies as middle class, atheist, and feminist – says, “I’m white and I’m Indigenous. [...] I’ve seen my family members treated in pretty disgusting ways purely because they’re Aboriginal.” The experience he describes places him in a position where he can see the social inequalities and exercising of power by hegemonic masculine hierarchies;

I never have to deal with the ‘being Aboriginal’, because I don’t look Aboriginal. [...] I also realise, being that I am so intersectional – I’m white and I’m indigenous and also coming from a family that’s quite feminist – I have more of an insight into the issues that might exist.

For Aaron, his indigeneity and his whiteness are both important factors interlaced with both his feminism and how he views inequality. The consequences of being positioned as privileged in some ways, disadvantaged or discriminated against in other ways, has facilitated critical insights that ground Aaron’s politics.

Intersectionality brings attention to the ways in which men’s privilege does not indicate that privilege is evenly spread amongst all men (Pease 2014), which also means there is no single axis between men and power (Collins & Bilge 2016). The examples used in this section demonstrate the ways in which the participants’ feminist identities are affected by multiple axes of power and difference and how those axes impact upon each other.

**Radical feminism**

Some participants identify radical feminism as the one feminist movement that they find difficult when it comes to being a feminist man. This may be attributed to the perceived stigma of radical feminism’s identity politics, which recognises and subsequently works to
end patriarchy and male supremacy (Mackay 2015). Some of the men think that many people who don’t understand feminism “think that all feminists are radical feminists” (Aaron). Daniel argues, “I definitely think that there is this idea that all feminism is very radical and is trying to just destroy the natural way of life.” The men feel the biggest challenge in getting other men involved in feminism is this continuing idea that all of feminism is radical. Aaron argued that,

People who, ten years ago called themselves a liberal, came in contact with particularly radical parts of the feminist movement and have now gone towards what I call the alt-right movement. […] But I also wonder what the motivations are for people to come from these left wing positions and end up in an alt-right position due to coming in contact with radical elements. […] It doesn’t necessarily taint the group for me, but for quite a lot of men I think it does and in relation to feminism, I think it does.

This ‘taint’ that Aaron mentions is a problem that arises in Albert’s narrative as well. Albert’s choice of vocabulary mostly connects to radical feminists concentrated effort on achieving women’s liberation. He uses expressions such as “rais[ing] women up” and “break[ing] through the glass ceiling”, describing that there is “always a place for radicalism, because sometimes words aren’t enough.” Yet, Albert also argues that radicalism ‘taints’ the feminist movement for “most people”;

It’s tainted the word for a lot of people, to the point where some people are just scared of being associated with feminists by calling themselves a feminist. Because, when you say you’re a feminist, most people think, “oh, you want all men to die, you want all of men’s power to be gone,” and all of that kind of crap. I’m like, “no, I want equality.”

Albert describes a reaction that is common amongst the men I interviewed. Radical feminism projects a position of power, or of wanting to take power, a definite threat to men and patriarchy. Describing feminism as being ‘tainted’ by radicalism creates the impression
to some men, and some women, that feminism is corrupted. The participants believe that when men who are not involved with feminism understand radical feminism as the only feminism, it makes it difficult for them to relate to feminism. Barry argues, for example, “radicalism in all of its forms hampers involvement.”

What is important here is that some of the participants believe that many men reject feminism because they assume all feminism is radical feminism. In contradiction to these feelings and opinions is that radical feminism already rejects the idea of the male feminist because radical feminism identity politics straight forwardly denies that men can be feminists. This, however, is problematic because, as John describes, most men do not even know what radical feminism is;

I think most of them don't actually know what radical feminism is, as well. I think they have their own mutated version of what radical feminism would be, but I doubt any of them could actually give you a solid explanation on what it is.

John’s comment suggests that he believes some men have diverse, sometimes ambivalent, feelings about radical feminist politics, including the participants of the study. This impacts how the participants see themselves as feminists, as well as the challenges they face in convincing other men of feminist principles. Congruently, to reject an important part of feminist politics as a ‘taint’ can put into doubt men’s understanding of feminism and their self-identification as feminist.

**Being a good male feminist**

A prominent theme that came out of the interview data was the men’s understanding of what it means for them to be a good feminist. While the participants held very similar general views about what it means to be a good feminist, they did not necessarily agree on
every aspect of feminism. The participants acknowledged, however, that they need to adopt a way of being that demonstrates that men can be good feminists. The participants described that publicly self-identifying as feminists is an obvious demonstration of men being good feminists as it sends a strong signal to other men as a precedent to strive for, though they differed in their individual views on how that is done. According to the participants, being a good feminist as a man is also about maintaining positive support and progressing women and feminist movements, as well as working towards removing the gender gap. When the participants use the word feminism to describe themselves, they are signalling that they are taking a step beyond egalitarianism, to demonstrate a much stronger commitment to feminist ideals. Chris argued;

There is a tendency when you identify as egalitarian that you override the feminist discourse because you want to focus on both sides equally. It’s a noble idea, but in practice, what you’re doing is shutting down some of the much-needed discussion on the feminist side.

Being a good male feminist, according to Chris, necessitates taking steps to level the playing field between men and women by focussing on the discrimination women face within a patriarchal system. Chris believes that concentrating on both sides does nothing to improve the status quo. By being a good feminist and focussing his energy on women, Chris believes he is strengthening feminism rather than if he was just supporting it as a ‘pro-feminist’. Baily (2015) argues that “men’s relationship to feminism may change according to context” (p. 455). Barry, for instance, suggests that if a woman tells him he cannot be a feminist, he will comply and name himself an ally instead;

The [women] that sort of say, “ah, you can’t be a feminist, you’re a man,” sort of thing. Umm, and I can take their point. I am part of the system that is oppressing them. But I generally do just sort of side step the issue and go, well, ‘feminist ally’ or that sort of terminology. I’m not trying to step on your toes.
Barry’s comments demonstrate a genuine commitment to the negotiations of identities and politics of feminism. He is suggesting that he will work with women on their terms, as the title is not as important as the goal. Most of the participants feel this is a step in being a good male feminist. This point is also reflected in the comments of John and Daniel. John, who spends a lot of time with his grassroots feminist group argued, for example;

I don't necessarily label myself as a feminist, the women in the organisation are the ones who do. [...] Yeah, so the identity of being a feminist is an honour that I have had bestowed upon me by the women that I've been very fortunate to work with in this space.

Further, Daniel iterated;

I think that there are some feminists, especially older more traditional feminists who don’t really support the notion of men identifying as feminist [...] To be honest, I have full respect for that.

Like Barry, both these men demonstrate that a good male feminist is more committed to the feminist movement than the term feminist. They see the title of feminist as something that has to be earned, not simply claimed. Women being in control of what it is to be a feminist is posited by the men as more important than undue arguments about whether it is possible for men to be feminists. This was duly echoed amongst most of the participants, who believe that women are first, and their own identity comes second. All three men use terms such as ‘honour’, ‘being fortunate’, ‘having full respect’ and ‘trying not to step on toes’ to show their willingness to be a part of a female led movement and an admiration for the women that accept them. Participants’ comments indicate that in order for men to push a feminist agenda, male feminists need to be fluid in their identification.

Being a good feminist as a man requires building respectful healthy relationships with women and with other men in feminist movements. These relationships are markedly different to the ones men and women build within hegemonic systems, such as Male
Champions of Change\textsuperscript{7}. Stan refers to it as “becoming attuned to the otherness of the Other” where being a feminist as a man is about respecting and learning from women and feminism. This may be why non-feminist men find it difficult to comprehend the choices made by male feminists who respect difference and promote women’s equity. The relationships the participants have with feminism and women are therefore very important to the participants as they are pertinent to being a good feminist. For Stan, whose research interests lie in feminist geographies, being a good feminist however, is about higher order and progressive thinking as well as academic knowledge;

\begin{quote}
I think feminism for me kind of came in as a way of making sense of, initially, kind of exploitation in the context of the household and community. But then in terms of my lived experience, I have over time become more and more attuned to the ways in which household and community spaces at least in the context of heterosexual households, there’s a kind of asymmetry.
\end{quote}

Stan’s focus on exploitation highlights gender binary roles that are enforced by dominant and dominating hegemonic masculinities. In patriarchy, men hold power that women are generally excluded from. Pease (2014) argues that “dominance is socially constructed and psychically internalised” (p. 20). So, the patriarchy conditions society to believe that exploitation of women is seemingly natural, as is the men’s rights to exploit. Pease (2014) goes on to argue that in order to challenge dominant masculinities, there needs to be alternate models of identity that are not based on exploiter/exploited or domination/subordination. By mentioning female exploitation, Stan is distancing himself from this power-based asymmetry. In demonstrating what good feminism is to him, Stan is able to dismiss the pressure put on him as a man by patriarchy so that he can focus on what

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{7} Male Champions of Change is controlled by a group of male and female CEOs who work to improve women’s representation in leadership roles https://malechampionsofchange.com/
\end{footnotesize}
he is passionate about – improving communities and the balancing of gender roles in the home in the capacity of a feminist activist and an academic researcher.

Some participants described that when it comes to being a good feminist for women, men need to understand that they need to take on supporting roles for women rather than trying to lead. Overreaching is an issue most of the men are aware of. They are very careful not to mansplain to women and instead listen and respond respectfully and they are always aware that women have a far better understanding of where their inequality lies than men do. Rick argued:

I think men need to be conscious of that idea that, although we may be assisting, you know, help women achieve whatever they want to achieve, and in achieving equality, that equality is not ours to own or ours to dictate.

It is true that building these relationships within feminism always needs to be in favour of women and men do need to respect that. It is up to feminist women as to whether men can be feminists – some agree, some do not. However, the description Rick gives, as do some of the other men, tends to describe the practice of an ally or supporter of feminism rather than a feminist. This is not to argue that they are not male feminists, but it is important to decide where egalitarian commitment ends, and male feminism begins. Messerschmidt (2018) refers to this commitment as “Positive Masculinities”, which refers to “those masculinities (locally, regionally, and globally) that contribute to legitimating egalitarian relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities” (p. 41), which also includes those who identify as feminists. The men see it as a mutual acceptance of difference where they respect the ‘otherness of the Other’.
In addition to following women’s lead, some men described that being a good feminist also means showing men a healthier way of understanding the world that dominant masculinities do not promote. Aaron posits;

There’s so much culture out there on the internet that makes them feel like they’re right. This is to not blame them, as well. Like, I don’t necessarily think they’re arseholes or that they’re deliberately trying to be arseholes. I think that there’s a general culture out there which makes them feel like what they’re saying is correct. […] I believe that I need to identify as a feminist for other men more than for the women.

As Messerschmidt (2018) describes, dominant masculinities are “the most celebrated, common, or current form of masculinity.” Consequently, many men might not be unwilling to challenge hegemonic discourses of masculinity in fear of becoming less popular. The way participants interact and define their relationships with men is unpacked in the next chapter Doing Male Feminism. It is important, however, to explore the ways men communicate their feminist ideals when building relationships with other men, because as participants described it, convincing other men to be feminists or be part of feminism is difficult. Rick is cynical of some of the contemporary feminist initiatives that aim at attracting men to feminism. He argues that most men are not going to join a group or initiatives connected to feminism unless they are already thinking about feminism, which he referred to as “recruiting to the converted”. He feels a more direct route is a better option, explaining; “if you’re trying to not preach to the converted, if you’re actually trying to influence people, I think it’s a lot easier when men actually talk to men.” Rick describes an attitude that Kimmel (2015) also observed when lecturing about feminism and gender equality, a male student saw Kimmel, as a white man, being more able to give more of an “objective opinion” than women (min. 12:10). So, when Rick describes it as being easier when men talk to men, what he is really saying is that it is easier to hear about feminism and gender issues from a man than a woman. There is a long patriarchal tradition of associating men with objectivity, however, and so
there is a risk of reinforcing patriarchal ideals even when talking to other men about feminism. Rick, who is an ambassador for *White Ribbon*, a male led movement to stop violence against women, described during the interview that *White Ribbon* are “looking at doing programs in schools,” talking to students about gender and domestic based violence. This places Rick in a unique position, because *White Ribbon* is a male lead organisation. Flood (2014) argues that anti-violence advocacy is the most common form of activism for men. Rick believes having men teach boys about gender violence is effective way of doing male feminism, whether it is seen as an ‘objective opinion’ or not.

Leading by example is not an easy task either. Aaron, for example, describes how he has been “shunned by quite a few groups online – as in kicked out and not been allowed to continue my gaming,” for confronting misogyny in online gaming groups. He argues that if men and boys don’t see other men fighting for the rights of women and visibly demonstrating positive masculinity, “it’s easier for them to continue to have those attitudes.” Stan had a similar view;

> I also feel saying, I am a feminist, makes it harder for men who don’t identify that way or who are hostile to that to just say, oh well this is just women who want to wreck my enjoyment and be a pain. I think it’s important for men to say, well, that I am one too.

The participants generally hope to normalise feminist ways of being, some through broader teaching outcomes, some more directly within their own social circles. By normalising feminism, such as in Aaron confronting misogynist gamers, there is a general belief that positive masculinities will form outside of dominant hegemonies.
Conclusion

This chapter discussed the negotiations of power men need to make in order to identify as feminists. The participants argued that terms like equalist or gender equality nullifies any form of empowerment for women due to everyone being treated exactly the same rather than closing gaps. Moreover, they believe that being a male feminist means using male privilege to support women and further feminist movement. They also understand that they are influenced by multiple axes of power and difference and how those axes impact upon the men’s identities as well as each other.

The participants support feminist movement in general, but there is an overwhelming consensus that perceptions of radical feminism create a difficulty in attracting other men to feminism. Feminism is seen to be tainted by radical feminism, though the participants argue that amongst many men there is some ambivalence as to what radical feminism is, which creates a challenge in convincing men that feminism is good for them. However, the men believe that part of being a good feminist is positioning themselves in a complex politics of wider relations of power that privilege as well as disadvantage some men. This chapter demonstrates the complex negotiations men need to make to call themselves feminist and argues that being a male feminist is a continual negotiation of power and difference.
CHAPTER 4. DOING MALE FEMINISM

Introduction

Many of the men agree that for men to identify as feminists, they need to take an active role in improving the lives of women. The level of participation and the form that it came in differed between the participants. During the discussions, a distinction came up in the conversations in which the participants seemed to divide male feminism into two ways of doing – what they refer to as ‘active’ and ‘passive’ feminism. The men defined active feminism as taking on an active role in creating and developing social change. It was more about public activism or any other situation where a man puts himself in the public eye in support of feminism. Passive feminism was used to describe doing feminism in the background, which entailed listening, learning and performing tasks as directed by female feminists, away from public scrutiny. It is extremely interesting that the participants made this distinction given that listening, learning and performing tasks are all ways of being active – something they do. What the men are actually distinguishing between is doing activism (active) and other modes of doing feminism (passive), rather than engaging in feminism and not engaging. This is an important distinction to make, as simplifying themes into active and passive can connect to the idea that men are not really active if they take on a supportive position, which is an older patriarchal understanding of structured gender hierarchies.

There were five main themes on doing feminism apparent in the interviews. The first is the importance of male empathy. The participants believe that for men to be feminists, they need to be empathetic in order to appreciate the difficulties women face. The second theme is the participation in overt political activism. Changing from helping and educating (as discussed below) to partaking in active protest is what the participants identified as moving from passive to active feminism. The third theme is listening and assisting feminism
from the background and following women’s lead. Most of the men feel that they are not in a position to step in when a negative situation arises or take over a task unless directly asked to by women, often holding themselves back so as not to reinforce male led gender imbalance.

The fourth theme is feminist men taking on educator roles as teachers of other men (and sometimes women, though the participants feel it was not their place to tell a woman how to be a feminist). Some of the men feel they are in a position to discuss and confront non-feminist men about feminism. The fifth theme concerns the men’s belief that they can use their male privilege to help women gain any necessary skills women feel they need in order to achieve gender equity. A few of the men feel that filling gender quotas and getting women more practical experience, including training and support for women, is an important step towards creating gender parity. Some of Baily’s (2015) interviewees feel that men should use their privilege to the benefit of feminism.

Embracing feminism, then, includes men being empathetic to women’s needs, being background support to women, becoming feminist educators, partaking in feminist activism and using masculine power and privilege to help women achieve gender equity and equality. In this chapter I argue that these five themes are seen by the participants as the most effective way of doing male feminism and so, analysing these ways of doing gives insight into ways of attracting more men to feminism.

**Empathy**

The participants believe that for men to be able to do feminism and do it well, it necessarily starts with men developing empathy. It does not limit their feminism but rather allows them to understand and truly care about the inequities and inequalities faced by women. John told me “empathy is something that needs to be taught to men.” He, as well as
the other participants, believe that developing empathy allows men to look behind their invisible privilege and start to understand the difficulties others are facing. Bailey argues:

Just once dudes can realise just the amount of extra work women have to do, not just to catch up but simply to like walk home at night or to, you know, go out with their friends. In terms of what's expected of makeup or what's expected of violence and safety on the street or when you're drinking. Like once you realise the extent to which - all the extra labour that's involved for that whole other gender, I think you just start well having more empathy I suppose. After that you're going to get people who are more open minded to being like, “so what can I do about that?”.

Bailey demonstrates why empathy is such an important part of doing feminism as a man – it does not just allow men to recognise unfair gender structures, but empathy also helps men recognise difference in general. Men must recognise the ways masculine power contributes to the scenario Bailey is describing and how differently men would be placed within them. However, empathy is not as simplistic as recognising difference and then making changes. Kaplan (2011) is a researcher of the different forms of empathy and the reactions they cause. She argues that empathy does not necessarily lead to action. It can be ‘empty’ – a simple emotional response with no action; ‘secondary’ – a person distracts themselves so as not to face the issue; and ‘witnessing’ a response that causes “positive and pro-social” (p. 255) action and has an ethical imperative. Bailey certainly feels empathetic to women and what lengths they go to in order to protect themselves and be safe, so he acts upon it through the ‘witnessing’ response that Kaplan mentions. For Bailey, the situation that creates the empathy, creates the response.

Kaplan’s (2011) empty empathy is one of the biggest hurdles when dealing with men. Chris argues that men need to “recognise that they are part of the problem if they do nothing to help.” As mentioned in chapter 2, the catalyst for Chris is his overwhelming empathy he feels for women when he learnt of Rodger’s self-centred and sexist driven act of violence that
Rodger blamed on women who had rejected him. This event was traumatic for Chris, which quite easily could have elicited a ‘vicarious trauma’ response in Chris – a shut down or turning away. However, he was driven to act by being more active as a feminist, and so Chris demonstrates that, like Bailey, by ‘witnessing’ a misogynist event, he is now acting in a pro-social way working towards gender equally

There is also the view that patriarchal men see empathy as a weakness in men. Aaron argues that “when you feel empathy, then you have to care and caring can be very difficult for people. Particularly, you know, they’re in their own world, they’ve got their blinders on. Having to care about people outside of yourself takes a lot of effort.” John argues that empathy is difficult to detect in these types of men, especially in regard to women’s rights.

He told me;

There's a phrase that one of my friends told me about, that they saw on Tumblr recently which was, I can't figure out how to make you understand that you should care about other people. I think that is part of the problem. There is a bit of an empathy deficit floating around.

Aaron also suggested to me that actively increasing male empathy can have a snowball effect. This may mean persevering until your audience finally gets it;

...It will get to a point that they are able to understand that there’s something else going on over here that they didn’t get [...] I think the more we can see it, the more we’ve got to change it, the more chance people have of feeling empathy for a particular scenario.

While empathy helps men embrace feminist principles, it by no means results in the participants doing feminism in the same way – people’s empathetic response differs. Being a feminist as a male is not just about how empathy helps men become feminists. Discussing male empathy for women exposes a profound distinction between the paths women take to feminism and the paths taken by men. Women become feminists because they are subjected
to sexual violence, gender inequality and other forms of oppression done to them for being women. Men, however, turn to feminism because they ‘witness’ what is being done to women, the Other, and feel they need to be involved to make a change. No matter how empathetic men can be, they are always in the male position (Heath 1987) of privilege and power. This means we need to nurture social empathy in men to have them understand the costs of male privilege (Pease 2014). For men to self-identify as feminists, they must be fully aware of the difference between the two journeys men and women take towards feminism. I argue that to foster empathy in men, they need to ‘witness’ the trauma women go through in a form that will cause a desire to work with women in any capacity that women see fit, perhaps even as feminists.

**Political Activism**

An important slogan that is regularly quoted amongst feminists is ‘the personal is the political’ (Tarrant 2009), meaning women’s personal experiences are directly related to gendered power dynamics and gender inequality. Feminism is a political movement that critiques this in order to actively challenge patriarchal power. When men take on feminism, they necessarily need to work to undermine that power. Some of the participants do this publicly, what they call ‘active’ feminism, while others preferred to work privately or on a personal level, referred to by them as ‘passive’ feminism. However, as the slogan above suggests, the personal and the public affect political change equally and should both be considered important ways of advancing feminist politics. Bart defines being ‘active’ as those times that require;

> Men to stand up and say “that’s not right” to other men. And that’s the only way that that’s going to work - That’s not the ideal scenario, because it shouldn’t be like that, but in reality, it is - so if that’s what it
requires is, a man to say, you’re wrong, to another man, then that’s what’s got to happen.

Thus, Bart sees political activism and actively challenging other men as the preferred approach to doing feminism where listening, supporting and informally educating men blurs the relationships to feminists/ feminism with those men who are egalitarian or pro-feminists. It is still built from a position of support and active empathy, but it is a more visible position as a declaration of direct confrontation. Aaron is “overtly feminist. I talk directly about it online”, while Arnold’s activism is still developing;

It’s only up until the last 5-6 years that I’ve become even more aggressively political, […] because I’ve always just had that general passive feminism, and then I’ve just been like, well okay, there’s things that we can do. Let’s do a movement. Let’s frickin’ march. Let’s go nuts. Let’s do it.

Both men have recognised the point where the lines have blurred and so they endorse a more “active” response to confronting gendered power. Arthur said to me,

It might have Peter Cosgrove saying that the injustice you walk by is the injustice you accept. So yeah, just for me, the reason why I’m engaged with feminism is because I’m pissed off by the, injustice and the inequity.

Arthur is referring to a situation where a female colleague was ousted from an online group connecting filmmakers for questioning why there were only advertisements for cameramen and made sure the administrators remained non-contactable;

Essentially, you know, they’re kicked out or silenced a woman for asking them to use non-gender-specific language in an industry forum to encourage inclusivity. […] I contacted the administrators of the group, who I know loosely. […] The administrators said, “why are you asking?” To which my reply was quite simply, “You banned her. She doesn’t know who you are. She can’t contact you, but I know who you are. Can you explain to me?” And they said, “well look, it’s between us
and her.” Now, she’s taken it over today but she was quite happy she actually asked me to pursue it at first. […] She is somebody who is quite capable of fighting her own battles and now that I’ve told her to speak to, I know that she’s onto them today.

Arthur did not so much change from passive behaviour to active behaviour but instead shifted from a background supportive role to an open activist engagement that more directly confronted someone to right an injustice, and then moved back to the background when his role in the experience was over.

Some direct public activity is attained through joining activist groups, though not all activist groups work at the same level of action. Rick is part of the *White Ribbon Movement*; Albert has “gone to a lot of gay right movements and marches; Stan is part of “an academic-come-activist organisation”. The men generally agreed that there is no one specific way of doing feminism that is better than the others. When discussing differences in approaching activism in this way, John commented, “Yeah, there's so many different ways of doing it and there is no one silver bullet that's going to end patriarchy tomorrow.” If an answer cannot be found through direct political activism, then there comes a point for finding new or more informed ways of engaging, which requires actively re-educating the self and others.

Some of the participants argue that some male feminists see passive feminism as an opposing and lesser way of doing feminism rather than a complimentary form of active engagement. Aaron believes some people do passive feminism because they’re entire outlook is passive. He told me that “the vast majority of people are just passive in their approach, they live their life like that, but they wouldn’t necessarily go to a march or be involved in protest actions.” This would mean passive feminism is the preferred easy option for men, something that would make no sense to a female feminist.
Promoting feminism is always going to be challenging in a patriarchal society, especially when there are groups that oppose feminism already established within masculine hegemonies. Attaining gender equality for women necessarily requires direct political activism. It is a difficult conundrum because, as Aaron puts it;

The MRA groups are supporting a culture that already exists, whereas the feminists, or male feminists, or whatever you want to call them groups, are attempting to infiltrate a culture that is the hegemony.

The difficulties that Aaron brings up in his comments regarding ‘infiltrating the hegemony’ is that men who know they benefit from patriarchy are not going to see the benefits of a movement that will disrupt their own connections with power. They will see such actions as an assault to their masculinity. Pease (2014) makes a similar argument that challenging male privilege will create an emotional backlash because men’s privileged position is being threatened. So feminist political activism needs to be used in a way that it gathers enough momentum and creates enough cultural backing that it can oppose existing cultural beliefs and implement different cultural norms. However, without foregrounding direct political activism with some attempt at educating people on feminist theory and politics, such changes become extremely difficult – agreeing with feminist values, to these men, would question their masculinity. So what Aaron means when he refers to infiltrating the dominant hegemonic culture is changing the way men think within the hegemony by normalising feminist ideologies. He explains;

I don’t think the majority of people are protesters and all they want to do is fit in and so, if they find enough people who are around them who are thinking in that [feminist] way, it will start to change their hegemonic thinking as in they’ll start to feel like feminism is more of the norm rather than being the exception.
Some of the participants feel comfortable with directly confronting men who subscribe to dominant hegemonic attitudes, especially their attitudes about women. Bart in particular has a sales background and is at ease with his reverse-argument approach;

You can pull things and say, “why are men not capable of raising children? Are you too shit? Are you too poorly skilled to be able to raise a baby or to teach them things, or to school them? Is that not within your possible skillset as this wonderful, amazing person? So, why is that any different the other way around? Why is the woman not able to drive a car, or - what did they used to have - run a marathon? Why is that not within their skillset?”

Bart’s approach is a distinct way of educating his opponent if they care to listen. He is actively trying to stimulate inner reflection through higher order thinking. It also demonstrates that participants have a different way of interpreting how they are supposed to do feminism and that political activism is certainly not the only path they take and not the only active path, as will be demonstrated in the following sections.

Assisting and Listening to Female Feminists

Whether the participants involved themselves in feminist groups, were out with female friends, or saw misogyny in the workplace, there was a general consensus amongst the participants that men should take on a background role in feminism unless asked to step in, as Arthur was asked to do above. That is, they don’t want to assume that they need to be the reasonable voice or the protector as if women don’t have the capability to look after themselves. For instance, Chris explains it as this;

I want to be protective of [my partner] but I also know that she is a strong individual in her own right and as a feminist, I also want to step back and let her handle [any given situation]. She knows that I would back her up
and I would always be behind her and ready to step in, but I also don’t want to just pre-empt that because of course, she is her own person.

Connecting this comment to the argument of passive and active feminism, this example of passive can be described as quite active work. He actively calculates the situation, weighs his responsibilities as a male and as a feminist, and has chosen a course of action, that being, not undermining his partner’s capabilities nor assuming that he as a man needs to take charge. In order to do feminism well, Chris needs to actively assess his desire to take charge, informed by masculine power structures and male privilege, against his ideologies of following his partner’s lead. Many of the participants stressed that female leadership and direction were to always be at the forefront of any feminist engagement. This is congruent with the findings of research in the UK done by Baily (2015), who found that her female participants believed men in feminism should take on the role of allies to assist in the empowerment of women as directed by women. My participants interpret this as passive feminism; listening carefully, working in the background within feminist groups and only stepping forward when asked or when a situation required some sort of intervention. Barry felt it is important for women to take the lead in feminism. He is prepared to do what feminism requires of him but does not automatically assume that this is necessary;

It’s not my own experience, umm... And so, as long as the women are there, front and centre with their own experiences, and their own solutions, necessarily - So, not to say that they can’t get help, from you and me and other men. - But, I think, the solutions need to be engineered and created in a certain way that they help women’s disadvantage, you know, get women on more equal footing.

The argument Barry makes is that men should help rather than solve. Importantly, Barry does not talk about rewards or needing praise when he is able to act. A number of the participants question the idea that men need praise. Bailey argues that doing male feminism
is not about seeking rewards or recognition, though it is important for men to work behind the scenes;

> I think men have a responsibility to get out of the spotlight right, especially with something like feminism. I would be much more trying to like - invisibly trying to change things on the sideline rather than trying to be loud and proud and get applause for being a good feminist or whatever.

There is a definite awareness amongst the participants that men should not be spotlighted for doing feminism and should not seek accolades concerning their work within feminism. The participants argue that men should not require praise and should avoid the urge to take over. The reason they are so dubious is because they are actively trying to not come across as ‘virtue signallers’. People, mainly anti-feminist men, who use the term ‘virtue signalling’ are “people who delight in sniffing out hypocrisy [and] always have plausible reasons to accuse people of doing things merely because they want to be thought good people” (McClay 2018, p. 141). So, the men are being accused of positioning themselves within feminism in a way that is simply moral posturing to reassure women they are virtuous. This is definite reminder of how difficult it is to change the minds of men who are invested in maintaining patriarchal dominance.

Rather than place themselves at the fore and dominate a debate on feminism and hegemonic masculinity, the participants who prefer a ‘passive’ approach learn and listen and build a platform from which they can assist in subverting male privilege and power, in themselves as much as in others. Arthur explains it thus;

> You’ve got to give it [privilege] up without questioning it […] and you got to actually shut up and listen and just take that back seat and let women run the scene.
Daniel also mentioned it is not up to men to take the fore in feminist conversation without an invitation;

There might be times when I might like to say some things, but I might just sit back and recognise that this might not be really a conversation that they want me to jump in and give my input on it.

These two examples show that the participants are very conscious of resisting the desire to take over, recognising their ‘place’ within feminism. They see themselves as useful allies for women within feminism, rather than being there to step in and take over. Chris told me that as a man, “you can only amplify, you can’t create original thought [in feminism] […] you shouldn’t set out to kind of become a new feminist thinker.” This further indorses the idea that men need to recognise that they are there to assist women.

What the men have demonstrated here, is that they continually reflect upon their role and what feminism needs from them. Aaron listens more, Arthur shuts up and listens, Daniel sits back and waits to be invited into the conversation and Chris argues that only women can create new feminist thought. Each action they make comes with consequences and they understand this. The men are always active in their feminism but non-activist elements give them opportunities to rectify their own behaviour and grow from it. There is almost a self-imposed subjugation in that they have to put themselves last. It is a mutual decision between the participants and female feminists, rather than a forced subjugation by dominating masculinities. The idea here is for men to stop and think. When men do feminism, they have to change the way they act and their general perceptions regarding gender roles. Men have to listen to women and should always reflect and readjust their knowledge. Taking a background role helps the participants to do this effectively. However, to do means to act, and so doing feminism through assisting and listening is still an active process. So when the
men are taking on assisting roles in feminism and spend time listening and learning, they are
definitely working actively to better themselves.

**Educator Roles**

While many participants feeling their roles are better suited to the background in
working with women, some argued that it is a male feminist’s role to be feminist ‘educators’
of other men. They actively engage with education in two different ways. There is the more
informal and general education of men, which entails confronting somebody in a pub or
pulling up a friend who says something sexist or misogynistic. This way of educating men is
more to do with getting them to think rather than verbally lashing out and insulting them. It
is also not bound by the same rules of an educational institute that relies on professionalism.
This is rather the other, more formal educating role, the employed educator. This is where
the educator must engage with their students and acknowledge where the students’ thinking is
at and then open them up to other ways of thinking.

Informal ways in which the participants educate other men are the more casual
conversations they have where they are pulling up friends at the pub or calmly confronting
men, usually in public spaces, who have openly denigrated a woman. Rick is a prime
example of using this approach when dealing with misogyny;

There has been a few occasions whereby I’ve had to say to my friends,
“mate, look. I’m not okay with that joke, you know, that’s pretty cooked.
You know, not my taste,” and they’re like, “oh mate, c’mon, we’re just
having a laugh,” I’m like, “yeah, you know what? I’m happy to put
down a few beers if you actually say that in front of your mum. If you
can say it in front of your mum, then yeah fair enough, ok, I’ll take you
for it. But, if you don’t have the balls to say that in front of someone
that’s close to you that’s a woman, then mate, I’m not sure why you’re
saying it about someone who might be a mother to someone – who might be a sister to someone.

Rick’s approach attempts to get men to think about their own attitudes and behaviours by giving them context. He challenges them as much as he gets them to think more critically. John also uses similar techniques of conversation but prefers using “humour and factoids to give them something, just to put them off kilter.” He sees it as a long-term process;

Yeah, you have a bit of a laugh, you teach them something a bit different and I'll use moments like that to just introduce an alternate idea into what they're already thinking. Now it's not something that will radically change them to become instant feminists or anything like that, but you build on the building blocks over time.

Having an engineering background and coming late to feminism, John can talk to men about feminism in terminology they can more easily understand. He doesn’t just confront them, “I find that if you go hard and rail against someone, they'll shut down.” Instead he avoids conflict buy using “humour and factoids” to get his point across.

John and Rick in these examples work with groups they are familiar with. For Rick this is mainly based around his friends and colleagues, for John it is predominantly his occupation or his work within his non-for-profit feminist organisation. Casual conversation works for both men as a method of teaching because they maintain a relaxed environment in a place that maintains a friendly atmosphere (a pub for instance).

The more formal approach to teaching feminism is far more controlled as it is bound up by the rules of the institution involved but also engages more deeply with students. Aaron is an academic in the social sciences and tends to come across misogynistic behaviour in students new to university; “I have had to have many arguments in classes with students who’ve come from that MRA style background, who’ve been on the internet, bringing all that
sort of stuff.” However, the way he sequences his lessons builds knowledge in his students, so they explore different ways of thinking:

It’s not a matter of pushing an ideology because, of course, universities are meant to be open spaces. So, it’s a discussion. You know, having a discussion about, “but I’ve got all this evidence. Where’s the evidence that’s the other way around?””, you know, “can you show me that your perspective has evidence behind it?” And that’s what a university discussion should be from my point of view, and it should allow those perspectives.

Aaron lays the foundation of feminist thought and builds his student’s knowledge to challenge their own ways of thinking. Rather than explaining to people that there are different ways of thinking, he has his students actively engage in processes that will broaden their minds. Daniel’s experience as a professional educator differs from Aaron. He teaches workshops in sexual violence prevention, aimed at mainly first year university students. The company is called Bringing in the Bystander. Daniel described it as a feminist organisation that focuses on the responsibilities of bystanders in response to sexual or domestic violence and stalking. However, Daniel explained that sometimes doing feminist work may require avoiding the term feminism. This is congruent with Pease (2014) who argues that bystander intervention workshops work best when they promote anti-violence work as a community imperative because they avoid implicating men. Daniel told me:

When we start to use feminist jargon and feminist research terms and words, they start to feel a lot of resistance and pushback. So, I think over time, they might start to realise that what they're doing aligns with feminism but in that kind of workspace, situation, environment, I don’t think it's really crucial to be using the word feminism.

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8 Bringing in the Bystander is a bystander intervention workshop that educates bystanders on how to act when witnessing sexual violence, relationship violence or stalking. [https://cultureofrespect.org/program/bringing-in-the-bystander/](https://cultureofrespect.org/program/bringing-in-the-bystander/)
Daniel and Pease (2014) both indicate the difficulty of teaching those who are dubious about feminism and that doing feminism in this manner can be quite difficult. Like the other men, Daniel uses terms that indicate educating non-feminist men requires laying foundations and building slowly. Removing the term ‘feminism’ can be problematic and is seen by other participants as making feminism more “palatable” to men (as I discussed in chapter 3). However, it can also be argued that teaching those who have only been given the dominant masculine discourse throughout their lives needs to be approached carefully. Pease (2014) argues that men who live by the rules of patriarchy “are not seen as having any special responsibility to [speak out against gender violence] because they are men or because of their structural location within patriarchy” (p. 60). This is the general argument presented by most of the participants.

Considering the socially constructed negative perspective that most dominant and dominating masculinities associate with feminism, developing empathy and taking on feminist thinking can be difficult for such men. This is congruent with Flood’s (2014) argument that “efforts to end men’s violence against women face the enormous challenge of changing the entrenched gender inequalities or other collective or institutional processes that sustain the violence.” (p. 38). Educating men is a difficult task to pursue and sometimes requires a vast amount of effort. However, Flood (2014), who has done extensive work and research on male violence against women, argues that men’s attitudes towards women can change and are changing due to improved community education and engagement, foregrounded by extensive work done by men’s anti-violence activism. Education is important and some of the participants here see this as the best way for them to ‘do feminism’. There is, of course, a risk of violence if the people they are trying to educate become confrontational, however the men assure me this is a rare occurrence. Wanting to educate men under these circumstances is definitely an active pursuit in doing feminism.
Using Privilege and Power to Help Women

The final way of doing feminism identified by the participants is through using their own privilege to support women towards achieving parity with men. Albert argued “I’m here to affect change, but I also acknowledge the fact that I am a man and I am cisgendered, and I do have these privileges that you aren’t necessarily afforded. So, what I can do is use those privileges to help you?” Using privilege and power is about men making available to women previously unreachable resources in order for women to achieve gender equity. Bailey explained this as such; “I do like the idea of like men using their privilege and position of privilege to try to lift women up with them rather than like pulling the ladder up behind them.” This topic came up when discussing a group called Male Champions of Change, an initiative headed by male and female CEOs around Australia who work to “achieve significant and sustainable improvement in the unacceptably low levels of women in leadership” (2019, A Message to our Colleagues). It sparked discussions about contemporary online movements like #MeToo and the male celebrities that have lent their name to the cause. While some of the participants dislike the idea of both the initiatives, the majority think of them as good uses of privilege. Daniel sees the use of privilege to help women as involving both work on the self and political activism;

Having a strong moral compass, always being in the pursuit of learning more about feminist issues and advocating and fighting for people that don’t really have a platform; using your platform to advocate and fight for people who don’t really have a platform.

Both Bailey and Daniel use language that puts men into a position of responsibility in tackling patriarchal structures. Bailey’s “ladder” needs to remain in place so that each step is not a difficult climb and Daniel talks of a “platform” where men and male feminists are the support or base. Chris is also in agreement with this; “You are the soapbox on which they
stand and the megaphone by which they amplify their voice and that is our position in the movement.” The three men would put women in an equitable position and maintain that support by not removing the ladder, creating that platform and amplifying women’s voices in direct opposition to patriarchal hegemony.

The participants feel that the idea of gender equality, or treating everyone as equal, is a far cry from what they seek through gender equity. To do feminism is to recognise the subjugated position women have in society compared to men and then to use their male privilege to contribute to the movement for gender parity by cutting away the ‘everyone should be treated equal’ ideology and shift thought towards removing male privilege and power. However, this once again is more complex than it sounds. Each participant had different ideas on how to, do this. However, whatever method the men thought would work best, whether it be raising women up or dismantling structures and practices that create inequality, all the participants agree that using their power and privilege gets women onto the same (though not yet level) playing field as men, which can only benefit society.

Conclusion

Doing feminism is a complex process that requires active engagement. Some of the participants feel that male feminists need to take a background role and listen to women and follow the directions of women. They understand that it is not their position to take the lead on feminist thinking or activism. It is interesting that most of the men feel they are in subjugated positions within hegemonic masculinities, as discussed in other chapters, but still willingly to take on counterhegemonic practices by supporting feminism. Other participants took a serious role in educating other men in areas of gender studies, anti-violence initiatives, bystander intervention programs and healthy language and attitudes towards women. Those
who teach in a professional capacity used their influence to develop gender awareness in young men by having them challenge their own preconceived ideas. Those who saw themselves as informal educators used casual conversation as a way to elicit change in men’s thinking. A major element apparent in the data is that political activism is a definite part of the lives of most of the men. They see activism as the most active way of ‘doing feminism’, though this chapter demonstrated that everything the participants do for feminism may be considered active, whether it is improving themselves or the lives of women.
CONCLUSION

This research examines what it means to be a male feminist by considering the perspectives of men who self-identify as feminists. It analyses their negotiations between masculine hegemonic power and nonhegemonic subjectivities in relation to feminist movements and ideologies. The limited research on men’s motivations and experiences as feminists makes this study on men’s identification as feminists and their involvement in feminist movements an important contribution to the field of literature on men and feminism.

The participants are influenced by a variety of relations and events that has shown them that feminism is a more positive alternative for men than masculine hegemonies. I have demonstrated that influence feminism has on some men encourages them to identify as feminists themselves. Through analysis of the interviews, I noted a general view amongst participants that in order to get men interested in feminism, it is necessary to better understand the motivations, challenges, rewards and emotions that drive men away from hegemonic masculinities and toward counterhegemonic practices. As was revealed through my analysis, there is no end game for men who wish to identify as feminists. Male feminism involves constantly learning about new ways of understanding the everyday sexism and misogyny that women are subjected to in patriarchal societies and of understanding and questioning their own behaviour and privilege in a bid to improve the treatment of women. There is a constant negotiation of power that the participants undertake in order to identify as feminists and so it is important that men understand their lives are shaped by multiple axes of social division (Collins & Bilge 2016).

There is an overwhelming consensus by the participants that radical feminism makes it difficult to entice other men into feminist thinking and engaging in feminism. The participants, for the most part, believe that people in general see all feminism as being radical
feminism. There are difficulties in drawing more men to feminism because there is a perceived ‘taint’ to eject radical feminism as a good thing for feminism based on the ‘taint’ it creates that has people believing that all feminism is radical feminism. John, in particular, argued that most men don’t even know what radical feminism is. However, this perceived ‘taint’ is causing men to reject feminism according to the participants. This point is moot because radical feminism already rejects the idea of the male feminist because the male position “brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation” (Heath 1987). Some of the men feel this puts them in a position of continual negotiations of power and difference. While some participants strongly emphasise the importance of publicly identifying as feminists, others describe the label ‘male feminist’ as relatively insignificant compared to their contributions to feminism, describing that it is their efforts and not their identities that warranted attention. It should be noted, therefore, that men’s choice to identify as male feminists is to publicise a political and ethical perspective.

There are many roles men take on to promote feminist thinking and supporting women. Some roles are more active than others and while the participants divided male feminism into ‘active’ and ‘passive’, the analysis demonstrates that the men are always active in their feminism because they constantly working to improve themselves, women and other men. Further research should be undertaken on the reasons men shape their understanding of and responses to feminism.

This thesis has demonstrated that some of the primary reasons that men self-identify as feminists are to show greater solidarity with women and to attract men to feminism by offering alternative to the inequality promoted by patriarchal power structures. There is some contention, however, regarding when and where it is okay for men to take on the label of male feminist. To overcome this, men need to work diligently to further the feminist cause
and demonstrate that they understand the politics of gendered power that they disrupt when taking on feminist work.
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