MEN LEARNING FEMINISM: ENACTING AND REPRODUCING PRIVILEGE
THROUGH DISCOURSES OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

ROBERT PLEASANTS: Men Learning Feminism: Enacting and Reproducing Privilege
Through Discourses of Resistance
(under the direction of George W. Noblit)

This dissertation examines how men respond to learning feminism in women's studies courses. Specifically, it categorizes and describes forms of resistance to feminism that men enact through eleven discourses which serve to reify and reproduce their male privileges despite their stated willingness to learn feminism and position themselves as allies. This study is based on data collected from in-depth interviews with eight men taking women's studies courses at a large Southeastern university. Eleven discourses used by participants are discussed as four larger appeals: to self, to progress, to authority, and to moderation. After a thorough description and analysis of the discourses within each appeal, interconnections among discourses are made to examine how men avoid reflectively questioning their male privilege. Finally, this dissertation discusses implications for a feminist pedagogy that helps students to actively, reflectively, and reflexively engage with their resistance to feminism. Specifically, I suggest feminist teachers include the following strategies into their pedagogies and curricula and openly discuss them with students: (1) critiquing individualistic liberal thought and teaching a systemic view of gender inequality; (2) naming and engaging student resistance through reflection; (3) teaching a poststructuralist feminist critique of objectivity; and (4) helping men find personal investments in feminist theory. These strategies can help students

understand their resistance to feminism and the discourses through which they protect

and reify male privilege.

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SITUATING MYSELF AND OTHER MEN IN FEMINISM

In the spring of 1999, I enrolled in an introductory women's studies class during my final semester as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The class consisted of approximately forty students; including me, only three of them identified as men. Considering myself to be a liberal and open-minded person, I wanted to be successful in the course, to position myself as a pro-feminist man—in no small part because a woman whom I cared deeply about at the time was a women's studies major and identified as a feminist.[1] In part because I had proactively positioned myself to be a feminist ally, I did not feel intimidated by my minority status as a man within the course. In fact, I noticed that in the context of the classroom, I was often given extra praise for understanding and allying myself with feminism. Inspired both by the women in the course and the women in my life, I made a conscious effort to understand feminism and to learn from women's perspectives. What I did not expect from this learning experience was that it would speak to me so personally and have a lasting effect on my identity as a man, as a teacher, and as someone committed to working toward social justice.

My women's studies class was strikingly different from almost every other course I had taken in my college career: not only was it discussion-based, but it included regular reflection and personalization of knowledge in the form of weekly reaction papers. Additionally, the professor—who was the most ardently feminist person I had met up to

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[1] Without this woman—who is now my wife—I would not be a feminist, and this dissertation would never have been written.

that point in my life—did not "teach" her class in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, she asked different students to lead each class session after setting up a meeting with her and developing a plan for the day. Thus, the course was student-centered in more than one way: students were leading class sessions, and the professor also spent a great deal of time in contact with each student—both through student/teacher conferences and through the dialogue afforded by our reflection papers and her thoughtful responses.

As someone who was easily bored and distracted in large and impersonal lecture courses, the type of learning offered by my women's studies course was exceptionally attractive to me. Although the course content was a direct challenge to my privilege as an abled-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual white man, the pedagogy had me hooked. For this reason, I respected and trusted my professor, and because of my relationship with a feminist woman outside of the course, I truly wanted to understand feminism and take it personally despite the challenges it offered. Even though I felt a strong desire to understand it, I was more than surprised by the fact that learning feminist theory—at least in the classroom—seemed to come easy to me. The harder work for me was (and continues to be) taking feminism personally outside of the classroom. Integrating it more fully into my daily habits, actions, and thought patterns has proven an ongoing challenge for me over the past decade, as has learning to understand and negotiate my privilege. Whether I consciously use it to my advantage or not, privilege has always been a resource available to me.

When I returned to graduate school to pursue a doctoral degree in education, one of my primary interests was studying men's relationships to feminism and the ways in which men learned feminism both inside and outside of the classroom. Connecting

feminism with other theories and movements to end oppression, I also became interested

in critical and feminist pedagogies and the role of education—both at the systemic and

pedagogical levels—in working towards social justice. Yet, somehow I became

overwhelmed and intimidated by the barrage of coursework in my first year of graduate

work. Because of the academic, theoretical, and oftentimes impersonal nature of some of

my coursework, I began to feel that my desire to learn about men's relationships to

feminism was too personal a subject for me to pursue, perhaps inappropriate for scholarly

study at the doctoral level. It was not until I began studying qualitative methods that I

begin to feel enabled and encouraged to pursue this line of study. Embracing the ways in

which qualitative research and feminist thought place importance on people's subjective

experiences, I realized that the personal nature of this research was precisely the reason I

should pursue it as a course of study.

As I continued my work as a graduate student and found opportunities to teach at

both the undergraduate and graduate level, I began to experience feminism and women's

studies not only from the perspective of a student, but also from the perspective of a

teacher. As a feminist man,[2] I also began to reevaluate my role in feminist movement[3]

and teaching. After volunteering in organizations working against sexual and relationship

violence, I began to anchor my feminism in the material results of a patriarchal culture,[4]

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[2] For me, being a feminist man means recognizing the deep-rooted and constantly policed separation of men and women into separate—and inherently unequal—genders. From this recognition comes the responsibility to question the privilege conferred to oneself and to understand one's roles in relation to systems of gender: interpersonally, within one's community, and within larger structures of power and inequality (e.g., patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism, capitalism).

[3] Following bell hooks (2000), I use the term "feminist movement" instead of "*the* feminist movement" so as not to give the misleading impression that feminism is, has been, or should be a unified movement.

[4] Following Allan Johnson (1997; 2006), I define patriarchy as a culture that is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered.

analyzing and understanding the concrete costs of male dominance. Recognizing that men's violence is enabled by a culture that allows and often encourages its existence, I began to believe in the importance of teaching men about feminism as a way to begin changing the larger culture of violence in which we live. After facilitating brief workshops on campus designed to discuss men's role in sexual violence and prevention, I began to notice patterns of resistance coming from participants, particularly men, in response to feminist ideas and challenges to male privilege. As a way to better understand these reactions, I began thinking about how to study men's relationships to feminism and the ways in which men embraced, rejected, or formed some sort of negotiated reaction to feminist thought and challenges to male privilege.

As a pilot study for this dissertation, I interviewed four self-identified feminist men in the autumn of 2004. Because one of my interviewees was a fellow graduate student and a good friend, I also asked him to interview me to help me better understand my own adoption of feminism and the ways in which I have continued to negotiate my identity as a feminist man. Each of these initial interviews lasted approximately two hours, and the topics within each interview ranged from life history, relationships with women, coming to feminism, and struggles as a feminist man. These interviews were a way for me to more deeply explore my own relationship with feminism and to compare my experience with other self-identified feminist men. Of the themes that emerged from the data in this initial study, I became most interested in how feminist men negotiated their privilege, the guilt they felt as a result of it, and the ongoing processes by which men created and reinforced their identities as feminists.

While I remained interested in men who accept feminism and claim it as part of their identities, for my dissertation study I wanted to understand the ways in which men learn feminism in an educational context. In particular, I hoped to learn more about the assumptions, engagements, and reactions of men learning feminism. Because I identify and present myself as a man, I thought that other men would be likely to speak honestly and openly with me about their reactions to feminism, more so than they might in response to a researcher who presented as a woman. To collect my data, I decided to conduct interviews with men who had either recently taken or were currently enrolled in a women's studies class. My overall initial research questions were the following:

- How are men's assumptions about feminism met or unmet in women's studies classes, and do their perceptions of feminism change throughout the course?

- In what ways and why do men show interest in feminism?

- In what ways and why are men resistant to learning feminism, and how do they illustrate or enact this resistance?

Although I began with these general research questions, I began to focus specifically on the last question as my research progressed and as I began to analyze and interpret my data. As a result, this dissertation is centered on men's resistance to feminism through conversation and discourse that serves to reify their male privilege.

This focus on privilege and resistance to feminism resulted from my observations that a number of men in my study were expressing and enacting forms of resistance to feminism despite their self-perceptions of being generally "good guys" who were politically liberal and sympathetic to feminism. As I continued this research, I hoped I could name and better understand how male privilege operates for men trying to learn

feminism in a women's studies course. Not surprisingly, I found through this study that male privilege often operates to preserve itself. Although the eight men I interviewed considered themselves to be supportive of feminism—or at least responded as such when asked—most of them expressed or reflectively discussed feeling conscious and/or subconscious resistance to the feminist ideas presented in course readings or discussions. Conscious resistance manifested itself when participants openly expressed disagreements or defensiveness in reaction to feminism. Subconscious resistance took the form of disagreements or defensiveness which I interpreted from participants' statements or arguments, although I did not feel that participants were always aware of this resistance. In most cases of subconscious resistance, participants appealed to what they saw as objective fact rather than relying on a subjective worldview or a non-feminist, hegemonic version of truth.

As I continued studying these men learning feminism, I began to find patterns in their resistance and hoped to develop a schema to make sense of these patterns and to explain the ways in which men enact resistance to feminism. In a larger sense, I hoped to contribute to the broader literature about privilege and oppression so that this literature can include more work on how male privilege works—in its own particular way, but also in comparison to other forms of privilege (e.g., white, heterosexual, and economic privileges). In helping to understand men learning feminism, I hoped to contribute to research aligned with Nel Nodding's (1989) call for a "pedagogy of the oppressor that may transform oppressors into less harmful companions on an earth that all people must share" (p. 167).

Need for this Study

I began this study in relation to the following contexts: 1) feminist theory's liberalization and increasing marginalization within the popular discourse of gender and education; and 2) the material realities of men's violence against women from the intimate to the systemic level.

First, gender studies in education are turning increasingly towards boys (Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Weaver-Hightower, 2003), a shift that Weaver-Hightower calls the "boy turn" (p. 471) in educational research on gender. He points out that while a number of popular feminist texts on education proliferated in the mid-1990s (e.g., Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), an equal if not greater number of "backlash blockbusters" (Mills, 2003) were popular by the end of the same decade (e.g., Gurian, 2001; Sommers, 2000; Pollack; 1998). In the present neoliberal and allegedly post-feminist[5] era and within the limited framework of academic achievement, many studies of gender in education have begun to shift away from the achievement gains of girls to focus on the relative underachievement of boys in schools.

Despite the increased academic achievement of girls, moreover, we have seen little structural change of gender relations in the United States. Leadership in schools, churches, families, government, business, and entertainment still belongs primarily to men, and women's incomes still lag significantly behind men's (United States Census Bureau, 2005). Thus, this "boy turn" is premature and ultimately threatening to the feminist strides toward educational and social equality that have been made in the past half century. This premature turn towards post-feminism in both popular discourse and

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[5] The label "post-feminist" describes the belief that men and women have achieved equality; thus, feminism as a social theory is no longer necessary or relevant.

educational research suggests a need for more feminist studies in education, particularly those studying men learning feminism and the ways in which feminism might continue to promote equality between men and women.

Second, the gender inequality that exists in schools and society is correlated with—and maintained in part by—men's violence against women. Because of my experience as an advocate for women and an activist/educator against violence, I frame my study within this material context of men's violence against women. I also contextualize this study in an analysis of the everyday psychic violence women experience in a patriarchal culture. As Nel Noddings (1989) explains in *Women and Evil*, the material violence that women suffer has roots in everyday forms of abuse and suffering. In fact, according to Noddings, the foundation of men's violence against women is the "othering" described by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1952) that positions women as both secondary and subservient to a male norm. Noddings describes how:

> [w]omen have for centuries lived with both oppressors and oppressed in their own families. They have learned to please those who have exploited them and hindered their self-affirmation. They have learned to interpret father to children and children to father. They have learned that human beings thought evil by the world at large nevertheless have lovable qualities. In all this learning, skills develop and can surely be maintained and extended into public life. (p. 167)

In the sense that women are constantly limited and harmed by their positioning as the other, men's violence is an everyday, lived experience for women—it is the fabric upon which our society is built. For the reasons Noddings describes in the above quote, women "are in a peculiarly advantageous position to plan and implement a pedagogy for the oppressor" (166). Following Noddings, I suggest that a sustainable and effective

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approach to ending sexist oppression must include men learning from women through a feminist understanding of the world and a centering of women's subjectivities.

More concretely, the need for feminist men is highlighted in an examination of the reality of men's physical violence towards women. In the United States, girls and women are systematically targeted for acts of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual and physical violence, both within and outside of schools. Approximately one out of every six women in the United States has reported victimization by attempted or completed rape, compared to fewer than 3% of men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Additionally, as many as 85% of all victims of relationship abuse are female, while an approximately equal percentage of abusers are male (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). While boys and men are victims in the majority of non-sexual violent crimes, it is significant that men are also the perpetrators in the majority of *all* forms of violence. Although the current focus on boys in post-Columbine America often has included a conversation about school violence, many of these conversations fail to consider the ways in which violence is specifically a gendered phenomenon with boys and men disproportionately comprising perpetrators and girls and women disproportionately comprising victims and survivors (Katz, 2006; Katz & Jhally, 1999; Messerschmidt, 2000).

Men's violence against women can be viewed systemically through an understanding of rape culture in the United States (Boswell and Spade, 1996; Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005). Boswell and Spade (1996) describe rape culture simply as "a set of values and beliefs that provides an environment conducive to rape," specifying that it is a "generic culture surrounding and promoting rape, not the specific settings in which

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rape is likely to occur" (p. 133). While the United States as a nation and cultural entity may be considered as a rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005), we can also look at smaller microcosms — such as fraternities and college campuses — as environments that are more conducive to rape than others (Sanday, 1996; 2007).

While rape prevention programs for men are becoming more prevalent on college campuses, studies have shown that many one-time programs do not have a lasting effect on students and are thus unlikely to create significant cultural change (Yeater & O'Donahue, 1999). Many sexual assault prevention programs adopt a sociocultural framework (Berkowitz, Burkhart, & Bourg, 1994) to explain that rape and sexual assault are not always the result of criminal intent, but rather "learned behavior[s] acquired through routine social and environmental interaction" (Davis, 2000, p. 80) or "as a natural extension of the male socialization process" (Earle, 1996, p. 5). While the field of sexual assault prevention education largely teaches from this sociocultural framework and stems from feminist movement, most programs do not explicitly teach feminist theory. Given the pervasive influence of gender in students' lives and the larger culture which enables violent and abusive behavior, one-time programs are unlikely to effectively critique violent masculinity and significantly alter students' actions or beliefs as men (Katz, 2006). Given the limited impact of these short prevention programs, I am interested in the transformative potential of developing for men more sustained and long-term engagements with feminism—similar to what might occur over the course of a semester in a women's studies course. Through this study, I want to understand the possibilities for feminism as a kind of transformative education for men. Through a

feminist analysis,[6] students and researchers alike might better understand the fundamental ways in which gender itself serves as an organizing principle in the lives of individual students, as well as a significant factor in men's violence.

Benefits of this study

Although this study may have larger implications for social justice education, it is intended to benefit three groups in particular: feminist teachers; men who may be potential allies in feminism; and researchers attempting to understand privilege and oppression in the context of education. First, this study may benefit feminist teachers, who often experience student resistance to feminism (for examples in education, see Lather, 1991; Markowitz, 2005; Titus, 2000). This study may more particularly benefit teachers who teach about feminism in education and/or women's studies classrooms that include male students. While all students have investment in their gendered identities and their placement within a gendered society, men are often more resistant than women to learning about feminism. Any number of explanations may contribute to this resistance. First, many men stand to lose privileges conferred to them within the current gender system. Also, men may also feel as if feminism is an attack on men as a group, particularly if they except themselves from the category of oppressor. Similarly, men learning feminism may not want to see themselves as oppressors, nor may they want to see women in their lives as being oppressed. In short, if one has privilege available as a resource, life is much easier if one does not acknowledge that this privilege exists.

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[6] For the purposes of my study, I will discuss a feminist analysis as one seeking to understand socially-constructed gender as a root cause of inequality and violence. A further definition of feminism is provided latter in this chapter.

In addition to helping teachers in schools of education and women's studies departments, I hope this study will also benefit men who are potential allies in feminism. Following authors such as Connell (1995) and Kimmel and Messner (2006), I believe that men can both benefit from and contribute to feminist theory. Yet because feminism names and interrogates the male privilege conferred to men as a group,[7] many men assume that feminism is irrelevant or even anti-male. I hope this research may help elucidate the reasons for and the expressions of men's resistance to feminism in order to offer potential benefits (individually, inter-relationally, and systemically) of men embracing feminism.

Finally, and more broadly, this study might benefit educational theorists and social activists concerned with ending oppression through education. While a significant strand of critical education for social justice in the past thirty years has developed around Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) and the possibilities of using critical, student-centered pedagogy with marginalized students, there has been a lack of knowledge specifically about teaching oppressors about oppression, particularly in relation to men and feminism (Ellsworth, 1992; Noddings, 1989). I intend this study to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about how to develop this kind of education.

Situating Men's Engagements with Feminism

I have approached this study of men learning feminism from my own experience teaching and learning feminism and within the following frameworks: feminism; men's relationship to feminism; (male) privilege; and teaching and learning feminism. After establishing the kinds of feminism most relevant to my research and teaching, I will

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[7] This privilege is distributed, lived, and enacted in different ways for different individual men, largely depending on their positionalities.

discuss men's positions within and relationships to feminism, first analyzing four different movements of men as described by Lingard and Douglas (1999). I will then summarize Connell's (1995) interviews and analysis of individual men reacting to feminism. In that section, I will also examine the range of men's responses to their male privilege. Finally, I will briefly discuss literature on teaching feminism in light of student resistance to feminist ideas.

Feminism

Because of the diversity of feminisms, I must be clear about the definition of feminism I will use for this study. While I will offer my own perspective on feminism, the existence of many forms of feminism is significant to this study because men's reactions to feminism may be based on diverse and sometimes contradictory versions of it. In my dissertation study, participants learned about different forms of feminism in their classrooms, some of which presented a greater degree of challenge to them than others. Recognizing the existence of a diversity of feminisms, I follow bell hooks (2000) and begin by broadly defining feminism as any theory or movement that works to end sexist inequality and the oppression of women.[8] Kenway and Modra (1992) provide a more detailed explanation of feminism that is also helpful for purposes of this study:

> Feminism is premised on the recognition that gender is a phenomenon which helps to shape our society. Feminists believe that women are located unequally in the social foundation, often devalued, exploited, and oppressed. Education systems, the knowledge which they offer and the practices which constitute them, are seen to be complicit in this. Feminists share a commitment to a form of politics directed towards ending the social arrangements which lead women to be "other than," less than, put down, and put upon. Feminism, then, is a social theory and a social movement, but it is also a personal political practice. (p. 139)

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[8] In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks (2000) states: "Feminist struggle takes place anytime anywhere any female or male resists sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. Feminist movement happens when groups of people come together with an organized strategy to take action to eliminate patriarchy" (p. xi).

As Kenway and Modra suggest, a necessary first step in understanding any feminist theory is recognition of the historic and ongoing inequality between men and women. This inequality has existed and continues to exist in many forms—politically, socially, economically, and sexually—and on many different levels—personally, interpersonally, locally, nationally, culturally, and symbolically.

Much of the discourse on gender and education has worked within a liberal feminist framework, focusing on individual and cultural sexism more than the systems of power within which they operate. Liberalism, broadly defined, holds the individual as the key to social change through freedom of choice and equality of opportunity. A liberal framework seeks means to broaden access to existing social institutions as they are currently constructed, instead of changing those institutions or creating new ones. In other words, liberal feminism aims to increase the opportunities that are available to women but does not strive to significantly alter the systems within which these opportunities are available. Liberal feminism often uses the legal system as a means to effect change and create opportunities for women.

Within the field of education, liberal feminism has focused primarily on girls' and women's access to educational opportunity and girls' and women's academic achievement in relation to boys' and men's. Yet liberal feminism has its limitations for creating lasting change towards gender equity because its focus on individuals leaves systems of inequality intact. When the discourse on gender and education works only within a liberal framework and limits its focus to academic achievement, teachers and researchers only engage with gender on a surface level, ignoring patriarchy as a system

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and the many ways gender affects students personally, socially, economically, and historically (Connell, 1987; Pleasants & Ezzell, 2007, in press).

While liberal feminism typically works within existing structures of power,[9] more radical forms of feminism question these systems and conceive of alternatives. A more challenging radical feminist approach goes beyond simply analyzing the opportunities and achievements of women to examine the inequalities created through the male/female dichotomy of gender, which is seen as the root of oppression.[10] As such, a radical analysis is one which seeks to get at root causes of gender-based oppression through a more critical examination of gender itself and the gender-based system of patriarchy that enables and reinforces sexist inequality. As Johnson (1997) explains, radical feminism focuses on "the underlying male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered, control-obsessed patriarchal system that produces gender oppression" (p. 119). Radical feminism sees gender as connected with other patriarchal systems that benefit men as a group at the expense of women as a group. Although radical feminism sees gender as a root cause of oppression, its critical lens often includes connections to and critiques of other forms of oppression such as racism, capitalism, and especially homophobia (Pharr, 1988).

Further, working against the liberal assumption that male/female differences are both biologically rooted and benign, radical forms of feminism question the social construction and constant maintenance of gender in society (Connell, 1987, 1995; Johnson, 1997; Lorber, 1994). Further, radical feminism questions both the origins and effects of gender itself. Whereas liberal feminism often views gender as a neutral

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[9] For example, capitalism, heterosexuality, and dichotomous gender roles.

[10] As Schwalbe (2004) points out, the word 'radical' comes from the Latin word for 'root.'

difference between men and women,[11] radical feminism asserts that gender dichotomies are socially created and reinforced and are inherently differences of *inequality*. Although radical feminism has been historically separatist, encouraging distinct woman-based spaces apart from men, the form of radical feminism I use here includes a more collaborative—though woman-led—framework that includes both men and women.

Because radical versions of feminism so fundamentally challenge many people's worldviews and identities as gendered beings, student resistance to them is not surprising (Kleinman, Copp, & Sandstrom, 2006). As Johnson (1997) explains, radical feminism is "avoided, dismissed, and attacked precisely because it raises critical questions that most people would rather ignore" (p. 124). Liberal feminism, on the other hand, has held a more popular position because it offers no real challenge to male privilege. Although feminism—whether liberal or radical—has helped to gain more opportunities for the advancement of women, a backlash against feminism has always existed. This backlash has become stronger since the 1980s, in no small part because of the more radical and inclusive turn of feminism and other anti-oppression movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Faludi, 1991).

Men and Feminism

Increasingly since the 1970s, feminists have cautiously called for the participation of men in feminist movement; after all, if radical feminism attempts to work at the roots of gendered oppression and end patriarchy, men and masculinity are the roots holding patriarchy in place. Additionally, and more recently, masculinity studies have increased in popularity, often looking at men's role in patriarchy and the ways in which men's lives are affected—both negatively and positively—by current gender relations (see Kimmel &

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[11] …and often assumes that gender differences are more biological than social…

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Messner, 2006). Yet in its focus on men, this field of study may not always work within a feminist framework. If masculinity studies move into a discourse separate from feminism, studies of men are more likely to work within a liberal framework that falsely equates women's experiences of oppression with men's issues and the costs that men suffer from a patriarchal system that benefits all men *as men* (for similar critiques, see Connell, 1995; Schwalbe, 1996). As Judith Newton (2002) states, "masculinity studies… run the risk of deradicalization, of failing to work toward structural alterations in men's privilege and power" (p. 188).

In their review of men's relationships to feminism, Lingard and Douglas (1999) describe men's responses to feminism within four categories varying in their degree of support or antipathy towards feminism: men's rights, masculinity therapy, conservative, and pro-feminism. According to Lingard and Douglas, men's rights advocates work within a liberal humanist, rights-based framework under the assumption of a "post feminist era" (p. 33) wherein feminist movement has successfully gained equal rights for women to the extent that men are currently experiencing a form of sexism, either in equal proportion to women or more so. Men's rights politics work under a socialization model, positing that traditional masculinity traps men in limiting roles that are damaging to their physical and mental health. Proponents of men's rights focus on men's suffering as equivalent to women's, focusing on fathers' rights, men's health, and defensive responses to sexual harassment and affirmative action laws, which are seen as anti-male. This response to feminism is popularly manifested in the aforementioned "backlash blockbusters" such as Christina Hoff Sommers' *The War Against Boys: How Misguided*

Feminism is Harming Our Young Men (2000) and, particularly, Warren Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power* (2001).

Similarly to men's rights movements, the masculinity therapy response to feminism also focuses on men's suffering, though on a more personal level (Johnson, 1997; Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Schwalbe, 1996). Stemming from the so-called men's liberation movements of the 1970s, the masculinity therapy movement focuses on the emotional and psychological pain of men. The mythopoetic men's movement, inspired by the Jungian theory of Robert Bly (author of 1990's *Iron John*), began in the 1980s and 1990s has typified the masculinity therapy response to feminism. Michael Schwalbe (1996) critiques and summarizes the impetus for the mythopoetic movement as the assumption that "feminist criticism of men and masculinity has caused many men to suffer a crisis of confidence; and that men need to be initiated into a sense of manhood" (p. 5). Simply stated, masculinity therapy attempts to create traditionally masculine men who are also able to expand their range of emotions and behaviors in traditionally feminine ways without giving up their male privilege. While some of the men in the masculinity therapy movement are sympathetic to select aspects of feminism, the overall movement lacks a feminist analysis and is supportive of a dominant and hegemonic version of masculinity, albeit a kinder and gentler hegemonic masculinity (Schwalbe, 1996).

More so than either the men's rights or the masculinity therapy models, men's conservative responses to feminism are more explicitly anti-feminist (Lingard & Douglas, 1999). Whereas advocates of masculinity therapy want to expand traditional masculinity to include elements that are stereotypically feminine, proponents of the

conservative response to feminism want to defend traditional masculinity and restore it to an even more traditional (and unabashedly dominant) place within gender relations. The conservative response to feminism relies on a biological rather than sociological explanation of masculinity, assuming that men are inherently more aggressive and dominant than women. Lingard and Douglas explain that the conservative response to feminism may be attractive to men because it is familiar and it serves as a justification for men's collective power over women. Further, the conservative response ultimately provides an excuse for men's power over women, which at its extreme may include men's physical and sexual assaults on women.

Finally, and in direct contrast to the conservative response, the fourth response of men to feminism is adopting a pro-feminist politics, or the "men's auxiliary to the women's movement" (Lingard & Douglas, 1999, p. 37). Generally speaking, pro-feminist men recognize the social and structural inequalities between men and women and desire to change these inequalities in the hopes of creating a safer and more equitable society. Within the men's pro-feminist movement, there has been a tension between those who see any form of masculinity as inherently problematic (Stoltenberg, 2000) and those who want to expand masculinity beyond hegemonic forms to become more diverse and inclusive.[12] R.W. Connell (1995) has written on the inherent difficulties of mobilizing a men's pro-feminist politics, critiquing men's liberation discourse that originated in the 1970s and stating that "the model of a liberation movement simply cannot apply to the group that holds the position of power" (235). One radical strategy within men's pro-

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[12] Those advocating the expansion of traditional masculinity include some of the men in the masculinity therapy category. See Schwalbe's (1996) *Unlocking the Iron Cage* for an insightful look at men who want to accept some aspects of feminism but retain masculine privilege. Advocates for expanding the forms of masculinity available also include Connell (1995) and those in the more postmodern transgender movement (Halberstam, 1998).

feminist politics has been the process of de-gendering and moving toward androgyny, while another strategy aligns more with queer theory's postmodern move towards questioning, critiquing, and more creatively playing with the very idea of gender itself (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998). Connell (1995) sees the most hope in the possibility of an intersectional politics which addresses the connections between gender and other structures of oppression: "Any curriculum must address the diversity of masculinities, and the intersections of gender with race, class and nationality, if it is not to fall into a sterile choice between celebration and negation of masculinity in general" (p. 239).

While the categories provided by Lingard and Douglas (1999) are helpful in looking broadly at men's movements responding to feminism, their analysis looks more at the social and political levels than the personal; they do not explore the ways in which individual men engage with and learn feminism. In a brief chapter from the book *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) describes the experience of Australian men who have "attempted to reform their masculinity, in part because of feminist criticism" (p. 120). Although Connell's study focuses specifically on heterosexual men within the Australian environmental movement of the 1980s, it offers a look at possible reactions that other men may have. Connell's participants had all striven toward hegemonic masculinity in some point in their lives in that they all described "competitiveness, career orientation, suppression of emotions, [and] homophobia" (p. 123) in their life histories. At the same time, similar to most of the participants in my initial research, five of the six men in Connell's study discussed familiar images of strong women in their lives, thus "feminist images of women's strength could resonate with something in their own experience" (p. 125). Each of the men was primed for feminism, in a sense, by their work with the

Australian environmentalism movement, which shared similar social justice and activist themes with feminist movements.

Even so, accepting feminism was not an easy process for the men. As with my pilot study (and as we will see in this dissertation), guilt was a prominent theme in Connell's (1995) interviews with feminist men. A brief transcript from one of Connell's interviews is telling:

> After university I was at the stage where I could understand academic literature, and I read some pretty heavy stuff, which made me feel terrible about being male for a long time. And I remember I found it really hard, because there was these conflicting needs. I needed sex and I needed relationships, and then again I needed to set aside my ideas [i.e. wishes] and my own sexism, and I couldn't reconcile those. And so I went through lots and lots of guilt. (p. 129)

Connell describes these feminist men as being conflicted by their guilt and also internalizing it, using feminism as an avenue for personal change. Yet, even though this personal change can be seen as positive in some ways, it is this focus on the personal that Connell critiques, because the men in this study interacted with feminism almost exclusively at a personal level and gave "little attention to economic inequality or institutionalized patriarchy, or to feminism as a political movement" (p. 130). The men were more interested in what feminism could offer them—in this case, increased degrees of expressiveness and emotional range—than in how they could contribute to feminism as a social movement. In this sense, Connell's feminist men can be compared to the myopic mythopoetic men participating in masculinity therapy in Schwalbe's (1996) *Unlocking the Iron Cage*.

The theme of guilt was also prominent in my initial interviews with self-identified feminist men; yet in contrast to Connell's participants, the men in my first study all viewed feminism as both a personal *and* political movement, and they were consciously

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active in feminist politics. One of the participants in my initial study stated that he was

concerned about his "disproportionate access to resources because of my background, the

fact that I'm a white, privileged male with a high level of education." As a result, he said,

"I feel guilty for having access to those resources." This participant and the other men I

interviewed used their guilt as a motivation for self-improvement, but they also used it as

a springboard for action. As one participant in my study stated, "It's not about being

guilty. It's about being moved to action, being responsible, which is different." I will

further discuss guilt in Chapter Three and the ways in which some men focus on guilt in

ways that may promote their resistance to learning feminism, while others may find a

more productive focus on guilt as an inspiration for seeking possibilities for change.

Privilege

      Because patriarchal culture is dominated by, centered upon, and identified with

male privilege (Johnson, 2006), even those who do not possess this privilege think, act,

and speak within its limits. In short, because male privilege defines the norm, everyone

within a patriarchy is influenced by and works within its discourses; thus women as well

as men may use patriarchal discourses of resistance (Hytten & Warren, 2003; Kleinman,

Copp, & Sandstrum, 2006; Lather, 1991; Titus, 2000). But because male students are

afforded more privilege within patriarchy, these discourses are more prominent in their

reactions to feminism as men attempt—both consciously and subconsciously—to

preserve their privilege.

      Although many men feel guilt in reaction to learning about their male privilege,

others remain unaware or semiconscious of its existence, or they are simply unbothered

by—even pleased with—the advantages conferred to them as men. As some studies have

found in the context of race, white privilege often works in ways to reify and reproduce itself in classrooms (Hytten & Warren, 2003; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Parallel strategies of resistance may exist in women's studies classrooms when men learn feminism. The preservation of privilege is central to Hytten and Warren's (2003) article "Engaging Whiteness: How Racial Power Gets Reified in Education." In this essay, the authors use classroom observations and interactions to build upon Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) "strategic rhetorics" (p. 295) to describe ways in which white privilege is preserved in education classrooms. Hytten and Warren term these methods of preservation as "discourses of engagement" (p. 67), moving away from Nakayama and Krizek's focus on intentional strategy because "the distinction between those in power and those under the influence of that power is a difficult one to secure" (p. 67). Hytten and Warren describe four broad patterns through which white privilege is reified in classroom discussions on race and categorized those patterns as "appeals": appeals to self; appeals to progress; appeals to authenticity; and appeals to extremes. They further explain:

> In appealing to self, students foreground their own feelings, emotions, experiences, and perceptions as they try both to make sense of the experiences of nonwhite others and to come to terms with their own whiteness. They do this through drawing comparisons with the experiences of others, dwelling on their own feelings and guilt, and distinguishing themselves from their more racist (or at least more unaware) friends and family. Appeals to progress involve pushing for immediate actions and solutions, reflecting on the progress that this society has already made in relation to race issues, and focusing on one's own self-enrichment as a form of progress. When students appeal to authenticity, they call on the "authentic" experience of nonwhite others (for example, their classmates or other friends or colleagues of color), cite scholarly authorities, and/or focus on the fact that while they understand the whiteness literature cognitively, it does not match how they experience the world. In appealing to extremes, students set up problematic binaries, and then position their understandings at one of the extreme poles of these binaries. For example, they contrast the "ideal world" we envision in the classroom with the "real world," where problems are just too big to

confront meaningfully. The other extremes they cite are between a culture of niceness and the need for conflict, and between silence and engagement. (p. 70)

Although Hytten and Warren's study is specifically about how white students reify whiteness in education classrooms, in my study I found that men learning feminism enact and perform similar discourses in the context of women's studies classrooms. The appeals described above were helpful to me as I began to frame my own findings about men's resistance to feminism. I will further discuss the appeals and discourses found in my study in the following chapter on methods, and in the remaining chapters, I will provide a more in-depth discussion of the ways in which men reify and reproduce their privilege.

In *Privilege, Power and Difference*, Allan Johnson (2006) offers a helpful framework for understanding the invisibility of privilege for those to whom it is conferred. He discusses how privilege operates "through what people think and feel and do" (p. 55) in ways that are often unnoticed by those who receive and perform it. He explains how "avoidance, exclusion, rejection, and devaluing" are common ways in which people exercise their privileges, but often these actions are "noticed only by the person experiencing them, and they can happen without anyone intending harm" (p. 56). Johnson is careful to make a distinction between the intentions of those with privilege and the consequences of their actions.

Johnson (2006) further explains that systems based on privilege are dominated, identified, and centered on privileged groups, and these characteristics of domination, identification, and centering "support the idea that members of the privileged groups are superior to those below them, and therefore, deserve their privilege" (p. 90). Elaborating on each characteristic, Johnson explains that domination includes the concentration of

those in the privileged group in positions of power, and the normalization of their occupying these positions. Similarly, because those with privilege are in positions of power, they are able to dictate cultural standards, meaning that social norms are identified with privileged groups. Thus, those outside the norm (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities) are often marked as others, outsiders who must adapt to the norm in order to adapt and succeed. Finally, explaining how socials systems are centered on the privileged group, Johnson elaborates on the effects of privilege and discusses the hegemony of dominant cultures in cultural norms and media representations. He explains the double bind that operates to keep subordinate groups marginalized: if they are silent about their situation, they remain "invisible and devalued," yet if they direct attention to themselves and attempt to push themselves toward the center, they "risk begin accused of being pushy or seeking special treatment" (p. 104). Because social systems are dominated by, identified with, and centered on privileged groups, those who fit within privileged categories see themselves as the norm, rendering privilege invisible to them.

In the context of education, one of the broader goals for critical and social justice education has been identifying and understanding how power works and affects social systems and the individuals within them (Freire, 2000). A central project in working toward social justice has been to understand, work with, and theorize from student resistance (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003). As Giroux (2001) explains, resistance "represents a mode of discourse that rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior" (p. 107). What has been lacking in the critical tradition is a complimentary in-depth examination of how privilege may operate in the form of student resistance to critical pedagogy itself.

To a large degree, the critical tradition in education has implicitly if not explicitly focused on teaching and learning of and *from* the oppressed more than teaching those who oppress. As Ellsworth (1992) describes, critical pedagogy "assumes a classroom of participants unified on the side of the subordinated against the subordinators" (p. 106). One of the underlying assumptions in this tradition is that once students recognize injustice or inequality, they will work to end it. Yet this is not necessarily true for those who serve to lose privileges in the pursuit of justice. What if those in privileged groups claim to want social justice but don't want to sacrifice their privileges? In this respect, a connection between critical and feminist pedagogy offers possibilities for a reflective interrogation of one's connection to systems of privilege and oppression.

Student Resistance to Learning Feminism

Given the ways in which feminism is likely to challenge and possibly alter students' worldviews, their resistance to it is an expected response, especially within the context of a larger patriarchal culture that reinforces separate and unequal gender roles. When students encounter radical feminism that questions gender itself, they must also confront gender's significance to their individual identities and their relationships to the world. As sociologists have pointed out for decades, gender is a significant factor in the ways in which societies are organized, and also therefore an important part of an individual's identity. Given the popular biological explanations of gender (in education, see Gurian, 2001),[13] the many ways in which gender is maintained and policed in everyday life (Pharr, 1988), and the prevalence of individualistic thinking in American culture (Johnson, 2006), it may be challenging and uncomfortable for individuals to question their gender identities as being socially constructed and reinforced. As Audrey

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[13] For counter-examples of biological explanations, see Butler (1990, 1993) and Fausto-Sterling (2000).

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Lorde (1984) has pointed out, when students experience challenges to commonly held norms, they may actually perceive such challenges as threats.

Further, because men are conferred more privileges than women within a patriarchy, it is not surprising that they are more likely to be resistant to feminist ideas that challenge their male privilege. In addition, males who accept more challenging radical feminist ideas and begin to question their gender identity must also grapple with not only a larger culture that places limits on acceptable forms of masculinity but also the guilt of being an oppressor and the dilemma of being constantly conferred privileges within an oppressive system (Connell, 1995). Simply put, the idea of gender is much easier left unquestioned for men.

Few studies have looked at the long term impact of women's studies courses (Stake & Hoffman, 2000; Stake & Rose, 1994) or the ways in which students resist feminist ideas through discourse (Markowitz, 2005; Titus, 2000). Similar to Hytten and Warren (2003) in their study of student resistance to understanding whiteness, Markowitz (2005) found that students often utilized dichotomous binary thinking in their resistance of feminism. Invoking moral dichotomies, she argues, "prevents students from engaging in a complex discourse that helps them to understand the social context of oppression, diversity, and inequality" (p. 53). To help students understand the complexity of oppression, Markowitz suggests feminist teachers explicitly engage students in critiquing binary thought. Teaching students to think beyond moral dichotomies is a form of feminist pedagogy that can help "expand students' cognitive/moral frameworks" (p. 53) and lessen their resistance to feminism in women's studies courses.

Titus (2000) discusses student resistance as something that can be viewed as "a basis for, rather than a barrier to, learning" (p. 22). Drawing from the critical work of Willis (1977) and Giroux (1983), Titus explains that:

> the concept of resistance also emphasizes human agency, in the sense that individuals are seen as not simply acted upon by social structures but as actively subverting the process of socialization, and struggling (against imposed social meanings and forms that marginalize or oppress) to create meaning of their own. It is within this struggle for agency that the complex patterns of student resistance are produced. Students might resist the ideological pressure they feel to adopt a feminist perspective. Female students may resist if they feel characterized as victims. (p. 24)

Looking at student resistance to feminism in a teacher education course, Titus categorized student resistance into four "postures" towards the existence of women's subordination to men: deny, discount, distance, and dismay (p. 22). Titus found that both male and female students sometimes *denied* the existence of oppression, but denial of sexist inequality was strongest from "white males who feel they are being cast into the role of exploiters and blamed for what they take to be a mythical oppression" (p. 26). Students who *discounted* inequality minimized feminist concerns and prioritized other forms of knowledge as being more important and valid, sometimes dismissing feminism as simple opinion. In particular, Titus found that students often targeted their teacher in particular as being opinionated for expressing a feminist perspective. When students *distanced* themselves from inequality, they "acknowledge[d] that a problem exists, but dismiss[ed] the significance of gender or absolve[d] themselves of any responsibility and shift[ed] blame on some unchangeable factor" (p. 30). Included in Titus's concept of the distancing were examples of students expressing concern that feminism (and/or their feminist teacher) was against or biased toward men. Finally, according to Titus, students who expressed *dismay* in response to learning feminism were overwhelmed by the scope

of what they learned and the lack of easy answers to work against oppression. After reviewing these forms of resistance, Titus suggests that "understanding students' resistance to course content dealing with structural inequality may allow us to formulate an analysis that is more convincing precisely because it does consider the beliefs and real life experiences of the students" (p. 34). While Titus offers a useful beginning by categorizing her students' resistance to feminism, her work does not offer specific recommendations for what such an analysis might look like within a classroom or for men in particular.

Finally, Patti Lather (1991) has troubled the very notion of student resistance, pointing out that the discourse of resistance to feminism places teachers in positions of authority and assumed validity and may thus place students in the position of "Other" (for related critiques, see also the essays within Luke & Gore, 1992). In fact, feminist teachers themselves may invoke a moral dichotomy (i.e. teachers and students who are against oppression versus students who support it) that is not productive in teaching students feminism (Markowitz, 2005). Instead of setting up this dichotomy between students and teachers, Lather offers a question that teachers must ask themselves: "How can we position ourselves as less masters of truth and justice and more as creators of a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf?" (p. 137). Instead of students following the teacher to a pre-determined understanding of feminism set by the teacher, Lather suggests that "our reading of the text becomes the curriculum, a curriculum designed not so much to oppose a counter-hegemonic meaning system against a dominant one as to insert ourselves into the discourses that envelop us" (p. 145). In other words, teachers should attempt to de-center their own authority as the holders of

feminist knowledge in the attempt to help students understand how they make meaning and knowledge in relation to the discourses and structures of power that shape their world. Doing so may be tricky in teaching men feminism, particularly if men are taught that these structures of power shape their world in the form of privileges that are constantly conferred to them in ways that benefit them. On the one hand, they may deny the existence of these privileges (Titus, 2000); while on the other hand, even if they acknowledge these privileges, there is no guarantee they will want to give them up.

Conclusions

As described above, my relationship to feminism has led me to critically examine my own and other men's roles in feminist movement. Framed in response to the patriarchal rape culture of the United States and in relation to the goals of social justice education, I hope to better understand how men respond and react to feminism, which I see as a social movement that offers a challenge to men's subordination of and violence towards women. Significant in my examination of men's relationship to feminism is an understanding of how male privilege operates.

In my studies thus far, I am unaware of any recent studies that focus specifically on men's resistance to feminism in the context of women's studies and in relation to social justice education. By providing an examination of men's responses to feminism in the context of women's studies classrooms, I hope that this dissertation will contribute to a line of scholarship that examines the ways in which men learn feminism. More broadly, I hope this study will continue a dialogue about how social justice education might serve to help those with privilege recognize its existence and work to either end it or use it in a way that benefits the greater good.

METHODS

The methods by which one conducts research are neither benign nor apolitical. As a feminist, I recognize the situatedness of knowledge and believe in the importance of subjective experience in forming knowledge and reality (Collins, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987), and I am critical of patriarchal notions of objectivity and rationality (de Beauvoir, 1952). I find qualitative methods align with these beliefs and help me to situate my participants' perspectives within contexts of power. In this sense, I take a feminist critical approach to research. As Lynda Stone (1995) suggests, feminism and critical theory have intersections that may be productive for research:

> Both are committed to emancipation and empowerment of persons. Both recognize the centrality of ideologies of power and change. Both are self-consciously oppositional to dominant traditions in theory and research. Both contextualize research in social and normative terms. Both are cognizant of the importance of education as a site of liberatory struggle. Both see their work, their theorizing and their politics, as praxis. (p. 150)

Additionally, because of its political nature, I hope my research can contribute to more effectively teaching feminism and other theories for social justice. In this way, I intend my work to be "simultaneously personally, politically, and academically significant" (Naples, 2003, p. 13).

Although a small body of feminist research has studied student resistance to learning feminism (Kleinman, Copp, & Sandstrum, 2006; Lather, 1991; Markowitz, 2005; Titus, 2000; Turkel, 1986), and a much larger body of literature exists examining the role of men in feminism, no recent studies have specifically looked at the ways in

which men resist learning feminism. Importantly, no qualitative studies have specifically included in-depth data collected by a male researcher studying men's resistance to feminism within the context of women's studies courses. As a feminist man, I found myself in a unique position to help contribute to qualitative research on learning and teaching feminism because my positionality allowed me to interact with other men in such a way that enables an open and honest discussion of their beliefs about feminism. Further, because I am a feminist man, a feminist teacher, and a former student in women's studies classrooms, I have experienced resistance to feminism both through my students and from my own personal experience as a student. These experiences contribute to my perspective and provide a unique and useful lens through which this research was conducted.

I also chose an interview-based qualitative research design primarily because I recognized the complexity of the topic at hand. As Irving Seidman (1998) explains, "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing" (p. 1). Through interviewing men learning feminism, I hoped to understand how men construct knowledge of feminism. What was most important to me in conducting this research was that I observed, interpreted, and made sense of the reactions, resistances, and thought processes of men learning feminism. I also wanted to talk with men as they were in the process of taking a women's studies course so that I might track their thoughts and feelings over the course of semester. I felt that a series of interviews would be the best way to capture the complexity of my participants' experiences and feelings, and such methods would enable me to track any possible progression within participants over time. Interviews allow a flexibility in working with

participants, and interview questions "tend to be more contextual and specific than research questions" (Glesne, 1999, p. 70), allowing for a nuanced and detailed understanding of my participants.

I also chose qualitative methods because I am attracted to the reflective and reflexive nature of qualitative research (Goodall, 2000). Because of my own experience learning and teaching feminism within women's studies classrooms and because of the importance of feminism in my research and teaching, I recognize my personal advocacy for and investment in feminism. I also recognize that my research is always personally motivated to some degree because I am curious to compare my own relationship to feminism with other men's. Qualitative methods allow me to reflectively explore and learn about my own relationship with feminism as I learn from and reflect upon the experiences of my participants. Reflecting upon my own experiences, I recognize that I cannot—nor do I desire to—position myself outside of the scope of this study. Additionally, because of their function as dominant and hegemonic discourses within North American culture, I cannot position myself outside of the discursive strategies used by the participants in my study. As a member of this culture, I am also affected by and sometimes reproduce these discourses through my own beliefs, conversations, and actions. As both a teacher and a student, I have much to learn about myself through the study of my participants.

Data Collection

To find participants for my study, I created a flyer (see Appendix A) which I distributed to three introductory women's studies classes at a large Southeastern university. One of the classes was an introductory lecture course of approximately 300

students that met twice a week as a large group and once a week for smaller recitations of 20-30 students; the other two classes were smaller (approximately 45 students) and were sections of an introductory course that was cross-listed in the sociology department. One of the sections of the smaller course was taught by someone who identified as male. All three courses attracted students from outside the discipline of women's studies because they fulfilled a university requirement for a course in diversity. Although participants each encountered different courses settings, instructors, and course readings, I did not see this variation as a confounding factor in my data collection. Rather than interviewing participants with the same baseline experience, I was more curious to carefully explore how each participant interpreted the concept of feminism based on his previous life experiences as well as his unique experience learning feminism.

In order to make my study attractive to participants, the flyer advertised two forms of reciprocity: payment of seven dollars an hour and the chance to "learn more about yourself." I hoped to find a sample size of six to ten male-identifying participants who were either currently enrolled in a women's studies class or had taken a course during the previous semester. Nine possible participants contacted me after receiving the flyer, and seven men followed through and became participants in my study. The eighth participant (Kevin) became a participant upon my personal invitation. A former student and someone I considered to be a personal friend, he agreed to participate in the study in part because he wanted to explore his relationship to feminism. Kevin he refused

payment for his time.[14] I explained the purpose of the study to participants, and each

signed an IRB-approved interview consent form (see Appendix B).

I interviewed each participant for 4 to 8 hours over the course of a semester in the

fall of 2006. The interviews were approximately weekly or bi-weekly, depending on

participants' schedules. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and I

conducted between 4 and 8 interviews with each participant. Because the weather was

temperate for most of the semester, interviews were almost exclusively conducted outside

at various campus locations. Each interview was recorded using a small, handheld digital

recorder, and I transcribed all interviews over the fall semester in 2006. Whenever

possible, I tried to transcribe as quickly as possible after interviews in order to record

observations, initial thoughts, and follow-up questions along with the recorded dialogue. I

took minor written notes sporadically throughout interviews, but I typically refrained

from doing so in order to maintain a desired comfortable and conversational tone with

participants.

Following and inverting Goodall's (2000) conception of "creative scholarship as

conversation" (p. 51), I thought of my interviews as representing conversation as creative

scholarship. Although I had a pre-written set of interview questions at the beginning of

the semester (see Appendix C), most interviews were unstructured and open-ended.

Interviews were "open" (Glesne, 1999, p. 93) in the sense that I developed questions in

response to topics brought up by participants. Additionally, initial interviews were

unstructured particularly because I wanted participants to feel comfortable talking

honestly with me about their thoughts and feelings about feminism; thus I prioritized

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[14] Another participant, Stewart, also declined payment for his interviews. Kevin and Stewart's refusal of
payment suggested that I was successful in offering reciprocity in the form of self-reflection and increased
self-knowledge. (Full disclosure: I bought Kevin lunch whenever we met at noon.)

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establishing a good rapport with each of them. Our initial interviews were more conversational, with a good deal of give and take, but over the course of the semester, they developed into a more semi-structured approach that included the pre-written interview questions.

In early interviews, I did not discuss my personal relationship to feminism with my participants unless they asked. Each participant was aware that I was conducting research on men learning feminism in the context of women's studies, but only three participants[15] were specifically aware of my identification as a feminist. I was surprised that the other participants were not more curious about my position or opinion on the topic of our discussions. Throughout the interviews, my feeling was that the other participants either assumed that I was sympathetic to feminism or were not significantly concerned about my positionality; as the research progressed, I felt that my questioning and probing led participants to eventually locate me within feminism. At the same time, I felt that I both consciously and subconsciously enacted the male privilege of being "one of the guys" in a way that enabled participants to open up in ways that would not likely have been possible with a female interviewer. In fact, regardless of my active enactment of this privilege my participants saw me as a white male, which undoubtedly influenced their perception of and reaction to me. To further position myself in their eyes, I often reciprocated by sharing my own experiences when I could relate to what participants were saying. Borrowing from Glesne (1999), I assumed and performed a "nondirective and somewhat therapeutic role" (p. 85) as an interviewer, listening, probing, and

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[15] Kevin knew of my feminist identification because he was a student in a class I taught about men's violence against women. We also both volunteered at a local domestic violence agency. Toby and Edward knew about me from mutual acquaintances.

sometimes empathizing with participants in a way that was intended to be non-judgmental.

Participants

All of my participants were undergraduates who identified as men and were either currently enrolled in a women's studies course or had taken a women's studies course during the previous semester. Of my eight participants, seven identified as White or Caucasian and one (Julius) identified as African-American or Black. All of my participants were between the ages of 18 and 22, with the exception of Stewart and Kevin, who were respectively 24 and 28 at the time of the interviews. Five of my participants took a smaller, discussion-based women's studies course that was cross-listed as a sociology course, and three participants took a large lecture-style class with a weekly recitation. Unless otherwise noted, each participant's course was taught by someone who identified as a woman. In the following paragraphs, I will offer a brief description of each of my participants. Each of the names used below is a pseudonym, some of which were chosen by participants.

At the time of my interviews, *Edward* was a senior finishing a degree in international studies. He was also finishing his tenure as the president of his fraternity, which had a reputation for being the "smart frat" on campus. Edward is white, and he had sandy colored, neatly trimmed hair and wore khakis and polo shirts to most of our interviews. He spoke thoughtfully and was friendly in his demeanor. When I first met him, Edward reminded me of a politician in a positive sense: he was articulate and charismatic, and he seemed genuinely interested in listening to a person with whom he was engaged in a conversation. Edward struck me as someone who has always been

comfortable talking with older adults. He also seemed to be popular on campus; during our interviews, Edward usually said hello to at least two or three people. Edward had taken a women's studies class the previous semester, and since then, he had identified himself as a feminist.

James was a tall sophomore with a slight but athletic build and a head of thick, dark hair. He often arrived at our interviews sweaty from playing tennis. He had a slight lisp in his speech and had what some might consider a somewhat feminine voice. Because James also mentioned that he like to cook and bake, it seemed to me that he was comfortable with a somewhat non-traditional masculinity for himself. James and I found a common interest in microbrewed and craft beers, and we typically spent fifteen to twenty minutes before interviews talking about beer. Rather than being a binge drinker or a stereotypical college male, he was a serious about his hobby tasting beer and collecting beer labels despite the fact that his 19 years of age put him below the legal drinking age. After taking a large introductory women's studies class the previous semester, James considered himself sympathetic to feminism, but he felt that he was "too lazy" (i.e., not active enough in the movement) to call himself a feminist.

Jimmy was a sophomore who grew up in a small town surrounded by much of his extended family. He was slightly overweight and tended to move languidly, but he spoke of his former success as a high school football player and his current participation in club sports. He had a fairly quiet and gentle demeanor, and he spoke slowly with a rural accent. Although he was quiet at first, Jimmy wasn't hesitant to talk once our interviews got started. He was the most socially conservative of my participants, positioning himself as "middle ground" but hoping to learn from his women's studies course. At the time of

our interviews, Jimmy was enrolled in the small section of the cross-listed women's studies class that was taught by a male graduate student.

Julius was a first-year student who had yet to declare a major. He and I exchanged emails for a few weeks before our schedules finally allowed us to meet. Julius seemed friendly and easygoing in his emails, and when we met, he matched my expectations. Because he was not traditionally masculine in his demeanor and because he was wearing a t-shirt advertising the university's center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, and Straight Ally students, I assumed that Julius identified as being gay. Without my asking, he confirmed this assumption early in our first interview. Julius warmed to me quickly, and he seemed happy to share his thoughts and feelings with me. He was at first reluctant to reveal some personal details of certain aspects of his life, but Julius soon shared with me some difficult aspects of his past: coming out to his family; growing up in poverty; his mother's drug addiction and abusive relationships; his own experience as a survivor of sexual assault. At the time of our interviews, he was enrolled in the large introductory women's studies course, and he expressed enthusiasm over the feminist ideas he learned in class and in recitation.

Kevin was short, with a muscular build left over from his days in the U. S. Coast Guard. I first met Kevin in a course that I taught about men's violence against women in the spring of 2006. He was one of a few men in the class, and in part because he was eager to meet other feminist men, we became friends in the late spring of that year, cycling together a few times each month. At 28, Kevin was older than my other participants. Because of friendship and closeness in age, our interviews were even more conversational than those with other participants. We often talked about Kevin's

negotiation and struggle to maintain an identity as a feminist man in relation to his past non-feminist experiences and non-supportive friends and family. Kevin had taken women's studies classes the past school year, and he was currently serving as a teaching assistant for a smaller introductory women's studies course.

Stewart was tall and lanky, with olive-colored skin and dark shoulder-length hair that was often obscured under a backwards baseball cap. He had a small "soul patch" of hair below his lower lip and wore chipped black fingernail polish to our first interview. Stewart was an art history major, and he immediately gave me the impression of being a unique guy, someone who isn't too concerned with what others think—or at least that is the image I felt he wanted to project. From our interviews, I got the impression that he was a bit of a loner but also a friendly person. I was surprised at the end of our first interview when Stewart declined payment for his participation. He said he figured karma would work out and someday when he was working on his dissertation, he'd get help from someone else. The fact that he was a recent cancer survivor who participated in other research studies within the past five years also seemed to play a role Stewart's refusal of payment. Stewart participated in the same large lecture-oriented women's studies class as Julius. He was hesitant to place a label on his political beliefs, but he deeply distrusted the government and leaned towards anarchism. Stewart's overall impression of feminism was that it generally fit into his already-held beliefs about women.

Toby was slim in stature and kept his hair closely cropped. Although he was a 19-year-old junior at the time of our interviews, he could have easily passed as being 16 or 17. His voice and his demeanor were not traditionally masculine, and he identified as

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bisexual. Toby grew up in an affluent town near the university, but recently found himself more isolated from his family because of his sexuality and his adoption of feminism. Toby had taken a smaller, introductory-based women's studies course the previous semester and was currently enrolled in two other women's studies courses at the time of the interview. He called himself a radical feminist and seemed to very much feel that feminism was important to his identity.

Tucker was a 21-year-old senior majoring in environmental studies. He outwardly exhibited a more masculine persona than any of my other participants. He talked often of outdoor activities, and he had the build of a football player. He also looked me in the eye more than most participants. Tucker talked flippantly about partying (specifically binge drinking and doing drugs) and "hooking up" with women much more than other participants. In our initial interviews, I felt myself being a bit intimidated by him for some reason, perhaps because of the way he presented a more traditional form of masculinity. Tucker's women's studies teacher was a male graduate student and he was in the same smaller, discussion-based course as Jimmy. From his initial interviews onward, Tucker used our interviews as a way to vent his frustrations with his women's studies class. Although he said he wanted to learn more about women and better himself through his course, he complained that the course was too much about "male-bashing." From these interviews, I assumed Tucker had an overall negative impression about feminism; thus, I was quite surprised during our final interview when he reluctantly called himself a feminist though admittedly "not the best feminist in the world."

Ethics and Reciprocity

I took a number of steps to ensure that my research was ethical. First, I protected the anonymity of each participant by using pseudonyms for participants that would represent them in my writings. Although our interviews were often conducted on campus in public places, these locations were agreed upon by participants. I also made sure participants did not feel pressured to answer any questions they were not comfortable with. Additionally, I assumed a more therapeutic role (Glesne, 1999) when participants offered extremely personal or sensitive information, and I made referrals to local service agencies at my discretion. For example, both Julius and Stewart revealed witnessing men physically abusing their mothers. In response, I suggested some books that might speak to their experience and gave them information about a local domestic violence agency. I also offered to listen if they wanted to speak more about these experiences in a context other than our interviews. Additionally, when Julius shared with me his experience as a survivor of sexual assault, I prioritized reflective and compassionate listening over any interview questions I had planned for that day, and I offered a referral to a local rape crisis agency in case he was interested in participating in therapy.

To make sure my interpretations were consistent with participants' experiences, I often asked the same questions during more than one interview, or I reflectively revisited a participant's response in an earlier interview to ensure that I understood his perspective. Additionally, I engaged in active listening with participants, following open-ended questions by reflecting their responses back to them with directive probes, clarifying and checking for understanding with statements such as "So what it sounds like you're saying is… ?" and "… is that what you mean?" As I began to notice trends in my ongoing data

analysis, I would often share tentative findings with participants to better understand if my themes matched their experience.

In all of my interviews, I struggled with the balance of obtaining data to better understand and learn from my participants and a desire to make their interview experiences meaningful to each of them. My participants shared much of their time, their emotional energy, and themselves with me; in response, I felt I was able to offer them a safe space to open themselves up and engage in self-reflection about their masculinity with another man, something I would argue is a rare opportunity for most men on a college campus. Indeed, their responses to me directly and indirectly confirmed this assumption. In this sense, my methodology was feminist because through our intensive, open-ended interviews, I was helping to give voice to these participants, even if some of their voices were not necessarily marginalized, and they sometimes even enacted or reproduced dominant power relations in the form of male privilege.

Finally, I freely shared my own reflections on my masculinity and talked with participants about my past and current struggles with feminism as it was relevant to our conversations, allowing them to learn from my experiences as much as they desired. Because men do not often have spaces in which they can express their feelings and reflect on their experiences (particularly in relation to their masculinity), my offering of such a space was a form of reciprocity toward my participants.

Data Analysis and Presentation

I transcribed my interviews as soon as possible after interviewing each participant, and I used transcription as an opportunity to reflect upon my data, develop follow-up questions, and search for themes. After collecting my data, I coded interviews

using Atlas.ti. As I began to analyze my data, I realized there was not a single story emerging from these interviews; instead, there were multiple stories to tell. Therefore, the story I tell in this dissertation represents a choice that I have made. Indeed, the story that I have (re)constructed and (re)presented here represents a partial understanding of reality (Van Maanen, 1995) and a subjective and partisan (Goodall, 2000) telling. As the primary instrument of research and the teller of this story, all information has been filtered through me—not only as I collected the data, but as I analyzed, interpreted, and represented my conversations with participants.

As I began to analyze the data I had collected, I sorted my findings into the following initial codes: action;, apathy; blaming; challenges; communication; concrete examples; emotions; fear of radical; giving language; guilt; inevitability; intentions; intimidation; feminism; liberalism; male bashing; minimizing; objectivity; open-mindedness; past; pedagogy; privilege; questioning norms; relevance; responsibility; reversing; socialization; stereotyping; sticking to values; and women. As I further sorted and searched for connections between these codes, what was most striking to me was that many of the themes I discovered in my data reflected participants' various forms of struggle with or resistance to feminism and women's studies—even in spite of the general sympathies they simultaneously expressed toward feminism. More so than other participants, James, Jimmy, and Tucker expressed and represented this resistance in their interviews; thus, the story of my dissertation is largely their story as seen through my eyes, though I use the voices of all participants in constructing this narrative.

Continually researching and reading as I collected and analyzed my data, I was attracted to the framework of "discourses" used to explain the ways in which students

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reify dominance in classrooms (for examples of similar findings in relation to whiteness, see Hytten & Warren, 2003; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). In looking at my coded data, I began to see men's resistance to feminism in terms of the discourses they used to criticize feminist thought and to preserve their privilege as men. I found that in spite of their self perceptions of being receptive to feminist thought and their intentions to understand, learn from, and personally grow from feminism, men draw upon discourses of patriarchy[16] to enact and preserve their male privilege. That is, even as participants studied a feminist critique of patriarchy and attempted a critical analysis, patriarchy and privilege continued to infiltrate, shape, and influence their reactions to class readings, to other students, to feminism, to their instructors, and to their women's studies courses. Separating my data into the discourses that participants used in our interviews, I then looked at how these discourses worked together to comprise broader appeals that participants utilized to preserve their privilege. Borrowing from and adapting a framework used by Hytten and Warren (2003),[17] I organized men's resistance to feminism within four appeals: *Appeals to Self*; *Appeals to Progress*; *Appeals to Authority*; and *Appeals to Moderation*. Although these four appeals often overlapped and blurred together, they were distinct enough to examine individually. This dissertation is a representation, discussion, and analysis of these appeals, and the following chapters will describe each in more detail.

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[16] I use "patriarchy" here instead of male privilege because these discourses, while male-identified and more likely to come from men, are not limited to male students. That said, regardless of the gender of those who employ them, these discourses function to preserve male privilege.

[17] In their study of the reproduction of white privilege, Hytten and Warren sort their discourses into the following categories: Appeals to Self, Appeals to Progress, Appeals to Authenticity, and Appeals to Extremes.

In Chapter Three, I will describe and analyze *Appeals to Self.* Appeals to self were strategies that participants employed to relate the feminist content of their women's studies courses to their own perspectives, positionalities, and privileges. I found that men in my study made appeals to self in four ways. The most common appeal to self was evidenced in their focus on the guilt experienced in relation to learning feminism. Participants also appealed to themselves by taking offense to course readings and discussions, distancing themselves from the sexist men talked about in their classrooms. Additionally, men in this study focused on their intentions as opposed to the possible harmful consequences of their actions. Finally, participants appealed to self by portraying themselves and other men as the victims of feminism.

Chapter Four examines the ways in which participants made *Appeals to Progress.* These appeals represent participants' attempts to situate the current reality of gender relations between men and women within a historical context. In these attempts, participants often made claims about the relative progress or improvement in gender relations both interpersonally and in the context of larger society. My participants made appeals to progress by citing the success (and therefore diminished relevance) of feminism and attributing gendered inequality as something that occurred in the past. Participants also made appeals to progress by viewing inequality as inevitable and therefore seeing progress as finite. Finally, in attempting to relate to women, they appealed to progress by claiming that feminism has progressed to the degree that men are now at certain disadvantages, equating their own experiences with the oppression of women, making false parallels (Schwalbe, 2004) between men's and women's experiences of oppression.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss *Appeals to Authority*. These appeals were made when participants valued their own experience over women's and minimized the effects of gendered oppression. Participants appealed to authority by minimizing the personal and subjective experiences of women and stressing the importance of objectivity. As they did so, participants simultaneously prioritized their own subjectivity and aligned themselves as speaking from a place of objectivity. Through these masculine notions of objectivity and authority, participants also criticized feminist strategy, questioning the practical goals of feminism and focusing on the strategic aims of feminism or the way in which feminism was taught in their women's studies courses. Within appeals to authority, participants often averted their focus away from the message of feminism and focused it instead on the messenger.

Chapter Six discusses ways in which participants made *Appeals to Moderation*. When participants appealed to moderation, they created binaries between a feminism they portrayed as extreme or irrational and their own moderate and rational perspectives. Specifically, participants portrayed feminist thought as a radical set of beliefs, sometimes invoking negative comparisons to communism or Marxism. As a contrast, some participants located themselves in a discourse of liberalism, citing their own open-mindedness and a belief in the inevitability of capitalism.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I will summarize and analyze these discourses in relation to participants' self perceptions and their enactment of privilege. In this chapter, I will highlight the interconnections among these discourses and further discuss their relationship to the reproduction and reification of male privilege inside and outside of the

classroom. I will conclude with implications and specific suggestions for how feminist

pedagogy can name and productively engage with men's resistance to feminism.

APPEALS TO SELF

In part because their women's studies courses encouraged the personalization of knowledge, participants often related feminist theory to their own lives and experiences. Yet, through this process, they often prioritized their personal perspectives over the feminist perspectives offered in their classrooms, enacting appeals to self (Hytten & Warren, 2003). When participants made these appeals to self, they privileged their own feelings and perceptions of feminism above all else. To better understand the ways in which my participants reacted and related to feminism, I grouped appeals to self in the following categories: a *discourse of guilt*, a *discourse of taking offense*, a *discourse of intentionality*, and a *discourse of victimhood*.

Hytten and Warren explain that within what they call a discourse of self-absorption, students "highlight their own guilt, embarrassment, and struggle" (p. 71) in confronting the privilege conferred to them. In my own data, I found that guilt was such a prominent theme and powerful influence in men's response to feminism that I chose to categorize this theme as a *discourse of guilt* through which they thought and spoke. I found that participants drew on what I call a *discourse of offense* when they focused on their own feelings in relation to course readings or discussions, taking offense to course readings and arguing against what they perceived to be unfair or overly broad stereotypes of men. I observed that men drew upon a *discourse of intentionality* when they focused on their intentions instead of thinking primarily about the consequences of their actions.

Finally, I found that men worked within a *discourse of victimhood* when they suggested that they and other men are actually placed in positions of disadvantage as a result of feminism and systems such as affirmative action.

"Nobody Wants to Hear That They're a Bad Person": The Discourse of Guilt

While guilt itself is not a form of resistance, nor is it exclusively an unproductive reaction to feminism, guilt may lead to defensiveness if men are not given an opportunity to harness their guilt and use it to effect positive change within themselves. Because guilt is neither a positive nor an inherently productive feeling, men may react to it by defending the actions or beliefs for which they (subconsciously, perhaps) perceive themselves to be guilty. Additionally, they may direct feelings of animosity towards the ideas (and often the people) who have caused them to feel guilty. In this way, the discourse of guilt can serve to inhibit men's receptivity to feminism. However, as I will explain later in this section, this discourse also has the potential for creating productive effects if seen as a means of self-improvement specifically within the context of a larger social movement of feminism.

As white men, Jimmy, Tucker, Edward, Toby, and Kevin all openly expressed feeling guilt when introduced to the feminist notion of male privilege, which for each of them was tied into the notion of white privilege as well. They recognized early in their women's studies classes that feminist ideas positioned men as the beneficiaries of gender inequality, and they felt singled out by this notion:

> *Jimmy*: The early readings about oppression and white privilege and male privilege, those just made me feel guilty. It was something I was born into, can't really change. What are you going to do?

> *Tucker*: The first few days of class I was frustrated with how the women were sort of talking about white males such as myself…. I guess I sort of have a problem

with women saying what men are all about, to some degree. I mean I know that they can get some—I'm sure they have some sort of input about how they are, but it's like going through *Cosmo* and shit. It's like, "What Men Want," written by some woman. I guess I was a little frustrated with how they were—the girls in class were—I mean, I don't like feeling guilty for being a white male. It's not like I can help that, you know? I'm the majority, I'm sorry. Whatever.… I just get a little frustrated with how people were just treating white males like the bad guy. We can't help that. We can't help that history has been kinder to us, to some degree.

Both Jimmy and Tucker expressed how their guilt was connected to both white and male privilege, and they indicated that they were not comfortable with these guilty feelings induced by the readings or their classmates. In response, they appealed to the fact that they are not at fault for being born white and male, ultimately concluding that they don't *deserve* to feel guilty. Furthermore, both men indicated a feeling of powerlessness about how to address their privilege.[18] Because feeling powerful and in control are features of hegemonic masculinity, this guilt over privilege also takes on a gendered aspect, which may, in turn, further influence men to react defensively against it. In a sense, guilt not only induces negative feelings by questioning these men's actions and/or beliefs, but it also serves to threaten their masculinity through feelings of powerlessness.

When I followed up with Tucker about how these reactions shaped his outlook on the course, he said, "I also expect to be frustrated because… I feel like we're being put down to some degree." Here, Tucker clearly and consciously indicated that guilt had negatively shaped his attitude toward his women's studies course. For Tucker, the discourse of guilt resulted in a focus on self-preservation, helping him to avoid negative feelings of guilt and frustration. Throughout the interview process, it seemed to me that Tucker's initial reaction to this guilt shaped his entire perception of his women's studies

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[18] In this citation of feeling powerless to change gendered power dynamics, they also draw from a *discourse of inevitability* by seeing inequality as inevitable. Further discussion of this idea will continue in Chapter Four, Appeals to Progress.

course, causing him to have a negative prejudice towards readings and class discussions.

Rather than questioning the genesis of his guilt and seeking ways in which he might

personally address these feelings, he reacted defensively to the guilt, using some of the

other discourses of engagement and resistance to avoid addressing the guilt induced by

struggling with his privilege. Thus, in his next interview, for example, Tucker was able to

simultaneously recognize the suffering caused by oppression while shifting focus away

from those who benefit from oppression and looking instead at those whose identities

make them susceptible to oppression, ultimately blaming the victim:

> Well I guess I mean they've had—through history, of course black people have suffered worse than white people, no doubt. And women have suffered more than men. So both of that double whammy they have. It's like they can just—I don't know—it's like they have an attitude problem sometimes, I think. It's like they like to take out aggression on people who aren't like them in some ways.

In focusing on those who name and speak against oppression, Tucker avoided asking

himself why he might be feeling guilty.[19] Throughout my interviews with him, Tucker

often said that he simply could not understand "the point" of much of the class, and he

expressed frustration with his women's studies course in each of his eight interviews.

In our final interview, Tucker seemed somewhat more conscious of the

defensiveness he felt in reaction to his guilt, but he did not indicate a willingness to

engage in self reflection and further explore the reasons he felt this way:

> [The readings on sexist inequality] are all more focused on [the fact that] men are all privileged and women have been downtrodden in the past, and they have a really tough time dealing with that…. I almost feel like it's not directly, but for the men, it's like they're trying to lay this guilt trip on us. I mean I understand the reasons why. These inequalities do exist, and they're wrong, but I sort of feel like their approach—sometimes the feminist approach—is flawed in the actions that they take to try to change these inequalities, you know?…. It's sort of like they

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[19] As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Tucker also spoke within the discourse of strategy by focusing on the messenger instead of the message.

point out these things, and then they haven't done a great job of incorporating these things that they see into the real-world today, you know?

In the above quote, Tucker granted validity to women's experiences of oppression, and seemed to indirectly acknowledge that men are responsible for this oppression when he said "I understand the reasons why." Yet instead of claiming some degree of that responsibility for himself or thinking about the role of other men in sexist oppression, Tucker concluded that feminists haven't yet found reasonable or practical answers for ending this oppression.[20] This frustration with the lack of solutions is understandable given the complexity of gendered oppression; what is significant in this context, however, is that Tucker reacted to his guilt with resistance and defensiveness, focusing on his own feelings and allowing him to maintain his privilege unexamined. In fact, his reaction to feeling guilt may actually serve to reinforce that privilege by making Tucker less open— or even hostile—to feminist ideas.

Later in his final interview, Tucker more self-consciously reflected on his negative reactions to feeling guilty and discussed the way that his guilt ultimately resulted in feelings of anger:

> It's sort of like there's a small degree of guilt that leads to anger, you know what I mean? I'm sort of like, well I hear all these crappy things that men have done, and yeah, that sucks, and I do feel sort of bad that women are treated this way, but it just keeps piling on and on and focuses on—I mean, I didn't even know this was a women's studies class when I signed up for it. I don't know. I guess it sort of fits the preconceived notion I had of a women's studies class. Let's sit around and talk about inequalities and how men wrong us, you know? […] I think it's tough to get things to change and to get better opportunities if you're just gonna be all negative, you know?

Again in this interview, Tucker expressed frustration about feeling guilt, but in a typically masculine reaction, he avoided introspection and kept his attention focused on the women

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[20] More on the discourse of strategy will be discussed in Chapter Five.

who caused him to feel guilt. Doing so allowed him to replace guilt (which is an internalized feeling) with an external focus on those who helped induce this feeling. Largely in part because of his negative responses to feeling guilt, it was my perception that Tucker may have actually left his women's studies course with more negative feelings about feminism—and perhaps even about women—than he had before the course.

Jimmy attended the same women's studies class as Tucker, and while his initial guilt in response to course readings was, like Tucker, focused on himself, Jimmy expressed fewer negative feelings about women throughout his interviews, and his overall perception of class discussions was nearly the opposite of Tucker's:

> Reading the articles, I felt like I was hated upon—white privilege, male privilege, all the stuff. I didn't do anything [wrong], but I felt guilt the after reading the articles. But going to the class and talking about it, I didn't feel so bad afterwards. So I think that was very helpful as far as that goes. […] There was equality when you walked into the classroom. No one's going to be looked down upon for their opinions, so it's very open.

For Jimmy, the course readings targeted his positionality as a white male, and he felt "hated upon" for this reason. However, he came to feel that classroom discussions did not represent an attack on himself personally as a privileged white male; rather, from his point of view, the classroom was a non-judgmental forum in which he was able to express himself and learn from others. In some cases, Jimmy felt this way because he saw ways in which he could change himself or effect change; in other instances, he felt relieved that he was better able to understand his actions within a context of social norms he was socialized to enact. This feeling of relief represents an important fulcrum wherein some students may be better able to work through guilt in a non-defensive context. The danger, however, in a pedagogical discourse of socialization is that this relief may have a

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converse effect, offering students a justification for oppressive behavior. If students feel that socialization is inevitable and omnipotent, they may feel powerless to change and therefore see this feeling as an excuse for their actions (and inactions). I will further discuss the effects of feeling powerlessness in Chapter Four in relation to the discourse of inevitability.

Edward's experience was similar to Jimmy's in that he felt that he was able to productively work through his guilt and the corresponding resistance he felt. In reflecting on his experience in a women's studies course, Edward self-consciously reflected on how he related the class to his life and how the resulting guilt created a "subconscious" defensiveness through which he had to work:

> The course is essentially about my life. I'm white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class. I'm a male. There's nothing wrong with my body that's inherently disabling and so the whole course was essentially—I won't say an assault, like it was presented as an assault, because it's presently very poignantly, not like, "You're bad" or "You're wrong," but it felt like—this is sort of difficult to phrase it the right way. I was defensive, but it was subconscious. I didn't realize it was coming out.

Like Jimmy and Tucker, Edward said that the course initially felt like an attack on his positionality as a (non-disabled, heterosexual) white male. Rather than focusing on gendered oppression as a social structure, Tucker, Jimmy, and Edward took the messages personally, feeling guilt in reaction. From my perspective, Edward seemed more self-aware of his feelings of resistance to this "assault," acknowledging the fact that he responded to feelings of guilt with certain defensive strategies:

> I would hear something in class and this sort of subconscious defensiveness would come up, and in the conversations with Leslie, who I was dating at the time. Sometimes it came out for different reasons. One reason would be because that person was presenting a very focused perspective that I felt like needed to be broadened, and other times I wanted to sort of tie people into the conversation.

> When I say broadened perspective, sometimes that had merit and sometimes it didn't. It was total BS. Probably most of it was BS.

As seen in the above quote, Edward noted his tendency to defensively focus on possible counterarguments (including what he viewed as narrowed perspectives) that might contradict the perspective of a course reading or a classmate.

Reflecting on his learning experience, Edward was conscious of his resistance and attributed his ability to overcome it to the structure and pedagogy employed in the course. Similar to Jimmy, Edward saw pedagogical factors as essential to helping him to let his guard down and to become more receptive to course ideas. More so than Jimmy, Edward viewed his women's studies course as an opportunity for self improvement, even if it proved to be a bitter pill and a frustrating process:

> Even with all these challenges, from about a week in, I had this sort of immediate trust in the teacher, because it was clear she had thought a lot about the formatting of her class, about the message was trying to send, and how these things were important in her life and how to best convey that. So I instantly had a lot of respect for the amount of time and effort that had clearly gone into the class.… I knew it was going to be different than anything I had taken before. I knew I needed to stick with it because of that, because it was going to be different from things I had come into contact with in the past. It was going to present a different worldview. I'm almost uncomfortable calling it a different worldview because a lot of it is just fact. It's not even a perspective as much as "this is just what has happened." This is how ethnic interests have been struck down, this is how women's interests have been struck down. I knew that the class was very much going to increase my—to provide a baseline for me to become a better person.

For Edward, his guilt was an obstacle that could be overcome in the service of self-improvement. In other words, he was able to acknowledge the guilt as being deserved and work through his defensive reactions because he saw a benefit in the broader and more personal goal of working to "become a better person." Thus, Edward—in contrast to Tucker—saw a potential for positive change in spite of (or perhaps because of) the guilt induced by the course. This focus on the potential for self improvement is a characteristic

feature of a discourse of guilt, but it also has the potential to work within a larger context.

For Edward, change first needed to happen internally: he felt that he needed to work on

his own sexist and oppressive behaviors before joining in other forms of social activism.

This focus on self as a necessary starting point was a consistent theme in Edward's

interviews.

Edward recognized, however, that despite his belief in the self-improvement

possibilities of his women's studies course, this process would not necessarily be an easy

one for him:

> The hardest thing for me was deprogramming.[21] You can say there's just so much bad stuff going on out there, but saying how does my behavior need to change? That is by far the tallest order of the course. People are comfortable with the constraints they have become used to. Once you begin to question the reason why they have lived the way that they live, you enter this realm of "What have I been doing all this time?" Regardless of whether or not you're right, you're just like 'This is just the way it is."… Nobody wants to hear that they're a bad person.

Edward recognized that being resistant and defensive was, in fact, easier than attempting

to question oneself and work on changing sexist beliefs or behaviors; by leaving one's

habits unquestioned, one avoids feeling guilt and does not feel pressured to change one's

actions or beliefs. At the most basic level, Edward's comments state that change requires

effort, and most people would prefer to live their lives without having to second-guess

and change their habits. As sociologist Allan Johnson frames this notion, most people are

comfortable taking the "path of least resistance" (2006, p. 80). Johnson's explanation of

these paths of least resistance echoes Edward's description of people as being

"comfortable in their constraints": "[T]he default position is to adopt the dominant

version of reality as though it's the only one there is" (p. 80).

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[21] For Edward, "deprogramming" referred to replacing sexist attitudes and behaviors with non-sexist attitudes and behaviors.

Toby, too, noticed that the work of self-improvement was emotionally tough, and that feelings of guilt were not necessarily decreased or alleviated by one's willingness to acknowledge a personal implication in oppression and to focus on personal change:

> I'm ashamed of myself. I feel silly that I didn't see it in my own actions or behavior, that it didn't occur to me. Then I also try not to beat myself up over it. You know, you're in the privileged group, so of course it's going to be invisible to you, but I want to make it as visible as possible.

In this quote, Toby suggested that he was able to work with his feelings of guilt or shame because he understood that privilege works to make itself unseen to those who possess it. Because privileged positionalities serve as societal norms, those who benefit from privilege are less likely to see that it exists at all (Delpit, 1998; Johnson, 2006). Toby's self improvement, like Edward's, was enabled by and consciously connected to a larger goal of ending oppression, not just improving oneself.

Toby and Kevin, as well as Edward to some degree, did not position themselves as resistant to feminist ideals at the time of their interviews, but their tendency to accept these ideals did not necessarily preclude their experiencing guilt in response to them. For Kevin in particular, the process of feminist self-improvement itself also created guilt by highlighting the gap between what he saw as his ideal self and the realities of his actions and beliefs. Particularly because Kevin and I had a more intimate relationship than other participants (as friends outside of our interviews), he and I confided in each other throughout the interviews about our struggle to close this difficult gap. Kevin talked about how he experienced the most intense guilt when reflecting on past experiences in which his actions were harmful to women:

> *Kevin*: It's interesting the amount of guilt—I don't know if it's just who I am, but I always feel a lot of guilt. I carry a lot of guilt. And I've never even done anything that bad, you know? I never—I'm constantly analyzing and reflecting on myself,

like okay? How did that situation go down with that woman? I've definitely never had sex with someone without their consent, anything like that, but still it's like I carry it, like I probably could've handled that situation way differently. It's just funny. I don't know.

Bob: Is there any particular example that you're thinking of?

Kevin: Yeah. I went home with his woman one time, and we were both really drunk, you know? That kind of thing. It wasn't so much how I treated her before, but how I treated her afterwards. I don't know. It's just weird how those things follow you around sometimes. So I think about that, how I did that. I've always considered myself a nice guy, but then you go from there to all these women who find themselves in situations like that quite a bit. There's no male equivalent. Guys just don't find themselves in that kind of situation. It's so fucked up. I get really mad about it and I get mad that I played a part in it. And I get mad that people don't see it. I don't know what has happen [to change it].

Bob: It sounds like it's not just guilt about the one incident.

Kevin: Yeah, it's greater than that.

While Toby was concerned about possibly continuing to support or enact oppression on a subconscious level, Kevin felt guilt about pre-feminist experiences in which he was hurtful to women. His anger over his culpability is directed both inward (at himself) and outward (toward the fact that other men are perpetuating such dynamics and the fact that many people are not aware of this oppression). Significantly, however, Kevin also used this anger as a motivation for him not only to change himself but also to join others in his community in feminist activist work.

Although he struggled with feelings of guilt within the discourse of guilt, Kevin was able to use it as an inspiration for self-improvement as well as an inspiration to volunteer with a local domestic violence agency. In this sense, he was able to take his self-absorbed guilt and transform it into an inspiration in a more karmic sense, harnessing it to contribute to feminist movement. Kevin said that he was more inspired to change his beliefs and actions in hopes that he could somehow make up for past wrongs:

Kevin: [N]o matter what you learn, you're going to be applying it to your own life and what you've done. That was huge for me, in order to see it. Comparing it to the things I've done in my life and the way I've treated women.

Bob: I wonder, too, if that adds to action, men trying to make up for things they've done.

Kevin: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, if you just do it enough, maybe you'll even things out, all the shit you've pulled in the past. I think that's absolutely my thought process. It's always there.

These responses to guilt suggest that men in women's studies courses need concrete examples of how to transform their guilt into more productive feelings. As the following section will also suggest, men are less likely to be defensive to feminism if they are given opportunities to improve themselves and become part of the solution. A precondition for creating these opportunities is positioning men as allies and not enemies in women's studies courses.

"You Don't Understand": The Discourse of Taking Offense

In *The Macho Paradox*, Jackson Katz (2006) writes: "If there is a reason to feel guilty, it should be about what [men] do or fail to do, not about their chance placement in one gender category" (p. 24). At times, men in my study felt guilty because they focused more on their social positionality in the gender category of male than on their individual actions or attitudes towards women. In part because of their reactions to these feelings of guilt, some participants expressed feeling offended by (and therefore acting defensively to) course materials or discussions in their women's studies courses, engaging in what I call a *discourse of taking offense*.

Of my participants, James and Tucker were the most vocal about taking offense to course readings or discussions. It is important to note that although they said they took offense to specific ideas expressed in the course, neither Tucker nor James positioned

themselves as being oppositional to feminism itself. However, in my interviews, I noticed

that they often spent more interview time criticizing aspects of their respective courses

than they spent saying positive things about course readings or discussions. Tucker and

James often used language similar to Edward's use of the term "assault" in the previous

section; they expressed feeling personally attacked because readings or course

discussions were critical of men as a group. These feelings of offense were often in

response to what participants saw as generalizations or stereotypes about men.

As stated above, James and Tucker distinguished between being critical of

feminism as a set of beliefs and being critical of the ways in which these beliefs were

presented to them. Tucker made a clear distinction between the message and the

messengers in two statements from his interviews. In one, he stated that "I feel like the

message is right. I feel like the way that the message is delivered is sort of wrong, you

know?" In a later interview, he made a similar distinction: "I don't have a single problem

with feminism. But some of the feminists—I feel like they sort of attack men. So I guess

that's my problem." Tucker's comments suggest that he recognized that his reaction to

feeling attacked as a man (by women) had interfered with his receptivity to feminism, a

point he expanded upon later in the interview:

> [Men] need to have their eyes open to some of the things that women have gone
> through and continue to go through. And I'd like to better myself by learning
> about these as well, but I guess just the whole class discussion sometimes turns
> into male-bashing, and I just don't like it.

These comments illustrate that while Tucker viewed feminism as a necessary message for

men and a potential opportunity for self-improvement if men were willing to learn it, he

took offense and reacted defensively when he felt that women were attacking men as a

group (and by extension, attacking him). In taking offense in this way, Tucker began to

disengage with course material, preserving his privilege by prioritizing his feelings over course content.

James also focused both on the delivery of the message and the overall message of feminism itself, working within a discourse of taking offense. Similar to Tucker, he was aware that he and other men were less likely to be receptive to feminism if they felt that they were targeted by it. Although he never directly told me that he felt himself reacting defensively to feminism, he repeatedly said he was offended by certain aspects of the course, and he clearly alluded to some degree of struggling with defensiveness:

> If you're exposed to these things and reading all the things that people believe and they have an opinion about something that you are your overall sex does, if you're going to be angry about that, you're going to be less likely to be open-minded and embrace what's being taught. You may learn the facts, but you're not going to open up and be like okay. If some of my friends read these articles, it would not have helped them at all.

Similar to Tucker's comments in the above section on guilt, James talked about taking offense and therefore feeling anger about women's generalizations about men's beliefs or behaviors. As in the discourse of guilt, reactions to generalizations within the discourse of taking offense were gendered in that anger is a more masculine reaction to being offended than introspection or empathy. Anger moves outward rather than inward, focusing on others more than oneself, and making it less likely that one can effect positive change based on such a reaction. In fact, James's use of the second person narrative ("you") above, also suggests that he may have been subconsciously distancing himself from his emotional reactions to stereotypes he felt were presented. This outward focus suggests that if men are unable or unwilling to confront their emotional reaction to feminist ideas, their appeals to self (which are about oneself) may also result in appeals to authority (which shift the focus to blaming others).

The discourse of taking offense is further gendered by the fact that men were particularly offended that *women* were generalizing men. Women's stereotypes about men were the primary reason that participants said they took offense in their women's studies courses—not only because they were generalizations *about men*, but also because they were *from women*. James viewed the fact that women could talk in such a manner about men as a double standard in class discussions:

> I'm not a woman. I don't understand what you're going through. But one thing I noticed was that a lot of what we read, and a lot of what we talked about, they seemed to have men completely figured out. They'd be like, "Men do this and men do that." And I was like, I don't do that. But we couldn't stereotype them and say "Women do this and women do that" because that's wrong. I thought it was kind of… unfair.… And that was probably the biggest thing that got on my nerves, and it was probably the biggest recurring thing. Well, being a man, of course I disagree with that, but I couldn't be like, well I probably don't have it as bad as you, but as much as I can't understand what you're going through, you don't understand my problems, so please don't try to say you do.

In this and other statements, James expressed frustration with the fact that women in his course generalized about men, that they had men "completely figured out," an idea that Tucker often referenced as well. James felt that whereas women in his course could make broad statements about males, men—as the minority within the classroom—were unable to make general statements about women. For James as well, the issue was not only the broad scope of the statements about men, but the fact that he did not feel as if he personally should be included in such statements. He stated, "I don't fit that criteria. It makes me question—if they're gonna make that generalization, if that's wrong, then what else could be wrong? It makes me think about stuff like that." These generalizations offered James an outlet for doubting women and feminism in general.

Because James and Tucker made exceptions for themselves in relation to stereotypes about men and viewed themselves as sympathetic to feminism, both

expressed a desire for men to be seen as allies and not only as perpetrators of sexist

oppression. Unlike Kevin, Edward, and Toby, they felt targeted by feminism and

therefore did not feel as if they were given the opportunity for self-improvement as allies

in the feminist movement. Tucker's reaction was that feeling attacked precluded any

receptivity to or investment in learning feminism:

> I guess I can understand why these women sort of fight back or whatever, but at the same time, I just don't really see that attacking mentality. I just don't think it works as far as if you're going to try to gain equality, then men are going to get defensive, and men are gonna say "Why should we try to make things better, if we're just going to get attacked in it, you know?" It's not really that extreme, I guess. Not that many men feel like that could happen. But when you sort hear it every day over and over again, it does sort of add up, and you're sort of like if we're just going to get shit talked to us everyday, what's the point of listening to you, you know?

Tucker again reluctantly acknowledged that he viewed women's opinions as

understandable, yet he did not feel that blaming men was helpful. On the flip side, Tucker

slightly minimized men's reactions to the "attacking mentality" when he says that "It's

not really that extreme, I guess. Not that many men feel like that could happen." Still,

Tucker posited that individual men are likely to stop listening to women—regardless of

the content of their message—if they feel that women are being hostile to men as a group.

In our conversations, a recurring theme with Tucker was his desire to be seen as a

potential ally and not as a target for criticism, suggesting that he and other men may be

more receptive to feminism and even willing to accept the reality of men's oppression of

women only if and when they feel positioned as allies and given opportunities for

participation:

[T]here was this really good article[22] that was saying that the feminist movement needs cooperation with men in order to be effective, and I thought that was maybe the best article we've read all semester.… It went away from that negative stance against men and was just sort of like if we want to change these things, we need to work together not just bash each other. And I feel like this class sort of would be better if we had sort of followed that article's mentality a little bit. Instead of 40 women and five guys—usually, when guys say something in there, the girls laugh and they sort of give dirty looks. I mean if a guy—when we try to defend ourselves, I guess, it's sort of like, oh, you're defending sexism? You know what I mean? That's not what we're trying to do. I usually keep my mouth shut for the most degree.

Tucker's reaction specifically illustrates how the discourse of taking offense works as an appeal to self: Tucker talked about men trying to "defend ourselves." From our interviews, it seemed that men's desire to do so often stemmed from two sources: from the desire to distance oneself individually from men as a group or from the desire to explain one's—or men's—intentions or reasons for acting in a certain manner. This latter desire also works within what I call the *discourse of intentionality*.

"I don't necessarily think of it like that": The Discourse of Intentionality

As noted above in the discourse of taking offense, some of my participants drew contrasts between how they personally felt or thought and the generalizations that they perceived women were making about men's feelings or thoughts in course readings or discussions. Thus, as I described above, the crux of working within a discourse of taking offense was that participants didn't personally feel the way that women (in readings or discussions) said that men think or feel. Similarly, within what I have named a *discourse of intentionality*, men prioritized their feelings over other perspectives, a distinctive feature of all appeals to self. What distinguishes the discourse of intentionality from the discourse of taking offense is the fact that men focused on their intentions. What men

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[22] bell hooks, "Men: Comrades in the Struggle" from *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center(2nd edition)* (2000).

intended, however, did not always match the actual consequences of their actions. This focus on intentionality not only prioritizes the self, but in doing so, it also ignores the social and relational context of one's actions.

By placing emphasis on their intentionality instead of the outcomes of their actions, participants shifted focus away from the consequences of their actions and were thus better able to hold onto certain beliefs or habits of action and preserve their male privilege. As Johnson explains:

> The sense of entitlement and superiority that underlies most forms of privilege runs so deep and is so entrenched that people don't have to think about it in order to act from it. They can always say they didn't mean it and, in a real sense, they're telling the truth. That's why 'I didn't mean it' can be so disarming and such an effective way to defend privilege. They *weren't* thinking, they *weren't* mindful, they *weren't* aware—all the things that go into 'meaning it.'" (p. 117, emphasis in original)

Thus, in fact, appealing to intentions is simultaneously an enactment and reassertion of one's privilege, regardless of whether or not one is conscious of it.

In a conversation about an early course reading, Jimmy provided a clear example of the discourse of intentionality by focusing on what he intended by his actions instead of looking at the context of his actions and the possible consequences of how his actions might affect someone else. In reference to Marilyn Frye's essay[23] defining oppression and explaining how seemingly minor issues fit into a larger pattern of oppression, Jimmy explained:

> We were talking about picking up the check. And the opinion of feminists is that, um, it's kinda looking down on women when guys pick it up. But then, you know, I don't necessarily think of it like that when I pick up the check. I think of it as more of respect for my date, you know? You're either smart enough or stupid enough to go out with me, so I'm going to buy you dinner out of respect for you to put up with me tonight. With that example of picking up the check, I see the point of where it's oppressing women, but then again,

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[23] "Oppression" in Marilyn Frye's (1982) *The Politics of Reality*.

it's a respect thing.… So um, I think that oppression is just left up to the eye of the beholder, you know? Whoever thinks they're being oppressed, they're being oppressed.

In framing the situation in this way, Jimmy prioritized his intentions of showing respect to his date over the actual feelings or reactions of his date. Jimmy made a similar reference to his good intentions in a later conversation about the same course reading:

I open doors for girls and guys and I don't think I'm privileged and they're being oppressed. I don't think it's like comparing them to a disabled person, which the disabled article gave as an example.

In prioritizing his intentions in both examples, Jimmy kept the focus of the conversation on himself, allowing him to ignore the larger social context within which male privilege asserts itself, thus reinforcing the power dynamic of women being economically dependent on men and possibly feeling pressured to emotionally or sexually reimburse men. As I will discuss later, ignoring this social context is also an appeal to authority because it minimizes the significance of individuals by failing to see how they connect to a larger social trend.

Yet because this privilege operates as a norm, men may not actually feel as though a privilege actually serves as a privilege for them if they focus on their intentions instead of the social context within which they think and act. Because appeals to self serve to make privilege invisible, they further impede men's ability to understand and feel that they can relate to feminism. Using a similar example as Jimmy, Tucker explains his feelings about the dynamic of men paying for dates:

I feel like you can't disregard the fact that women also have some advantages. Even with my girlfriend, who have been going out with for a while—just the way that our culture is set up, I feel wrong if I don't pick up the check. Even though she has more money than I do, she has a job and I don't. I feel like I'm expected to pay for those things, even if she says she doesn't want me to. It's like the way we are constructed, I feel wrong if I don't. And I'm not saying that's a huge deal, but I

think that is an advantage that women have over men. It's like men are expected to buy stuff for women to please them.

Tucker's intentions in paying for his girlfriend's dinner are simply to fit into social norms—in hopes that his girlfriend will not think less of him and in an effort to keep himself from feeling bad about not living up to these norms. In reflecting on his feelings and intentions, though, Tucker has reversed the dynamic of oppression to posit an advantage for women in this particular example.[24]

It is important to recognize that a focus on one's intentions in a given situation is also a focus on individuality. Such a narrow focus prevents one from seeing connections to larger structures of oppression. As Marilyn Frye states in the very article that Jimmy references above:

> One can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced (Frye, 1983, p. 5).

Thus, what is significant about the discourse of intentionality is not only the distinction between intentions and consequences, but also the shift in scale—the focus on the self (and self in relation to individual others) versus the focus on self in relation to larger social systems.

Even if men are able to relate their experience to a larger social context, they may still work within a discourse of intentionality if they prioritize intentions over consequences. Jimmy struggled with the relationship between his life and the dynamics of gendered oppression as he discussed patterns of gendered communication he read about in class. Thinking about communication as a gendered process fascinated Jimmy,

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[24] Which is also an example of the discourse of victimhood, discussed more in depth later in this chapter.

and he was excited about relating this process to his own life. As he discussed this

connection, he began to understand the ways in which intentions and consequences might

not match:

> *Jimmy*: I've been in these kinds of situations with my mom. She recently had a hysterectomy and she couldn't lift anything or anything like that and she was complaining about hurting and I said, "Well, take some Tylenol," which was me fixing it. Instead of me saying I'm sorry you hurt or anything like that. She was like no, that won't help. I was like what did I do? I was just trying to help…. I know not every guy's like this, but a good deal of them. That's how they think, if they think there's a problem they want to fix it.

> *Bob*: So do you think after reading the article if your mom said the same things you would react the same way?

> *Jimmy*: I think I would present two answers to her like, "I'm sorry you feel that way. You should take your vitamins. Or maybe you should go lay down." I try to balance both of them, because my first thought would not be to say "Oh, I feel your pain. I feel sorry for you. I was like this when I had surgery." I haven't had too many surgeries, I don't know. She was doing that for the emotional support, and I know that now. I kind of knew it then. But I didn't know how to react to it, you know? So yeah, I probably would try to act a little differently.

In this conversation, Jimmy touched on an awareness of the discourse of intentionality

and worked within its margins, recognizing that within gendered patterns of

communication, men and women may have different intentions, expectations, and

reactions. But he reverted to appealing to himself when he appealed to his intentions ("I

was just trying to help."). Ultimately, Jimmy split the difference and opted for a

compromising approach, aiming to offer the empathy his mother wanted ("I'm sorry you

feel that way.") while also fulfilling his own need to suggest solutions ("You should take

your vitamins. Or maybe you should go lay down.").

In trying to explain his and other men's defensive reactions to feminism and

women's studies, Edward expressed some degree of awareness about how he and others

spoke and thought within the discourse of intentionality. He talked broadly about

students' perceptions of themselves as trying to do what they see as right and respecting the women in their lives:

> People come into [women's studies courses] with a defense mechanism in place. Like "I'm a good person. I don't need to learn that. I have a girlfriend, I treat her right. Everybody says I do. My parents are great people, and there's no way they would do something like this." It's just—people have assumptions about what the course is going to teach them, and it seems like the opposite.… There was something about coming into that class every Tuesday/Thursday and sort of having friendships with these people that were being challenged like you.… Like, I appreciate the challenge, but I don't—I feel like I'm kinda unique to it, especially in the male population for appreciating that challenge. Most people would be like, "That's bullshit." That's the vibe I get from most guys.

As with the discourses described in the previous chapter as appeals to self, Edward recognized that defensiveness is a common reaction when men feel some sort of disconnect between their intentions and the consequences of their actions. For Edward, though, this defensiveness could be buffered and possibly worked through because he felt simultaneously supported and challenged in his women studies course. Perhaps other men can more self-consciously understand and work outside of the discourse of intentionality if they perceive their learning experiences to be similarly constructive.

"That's no disadvantage, it's an advantage": The Discourse of Victimhood

In explaining what they call a discourse of connections, Hytten and Warren (2003, p. 71) note that this discourse is "premised on the belief that at the most fundamental level, we all share some core human connection." They continue to explain that the potential harm within this discourse lies in the "relativizing of all differences and putting them on some sort of equal footing." In my study, I also found that participants searched for experiences in their own lives that helped them to understand the oppression of women. I also found that in doing so, participants sometimes prioritized their own experiences to such a degree that they decided that they actually saw them as analogous

to the oppression of women or racial minorities. Within what I call a *discourse of victimhood*, the men learning feminism in my study felt that they were at times disadvantaged because of their positionality as white men. In some instances, participants either felt that women ignored the suffering of men in their focus on women's oppression; in others, they actually expressed feelings that men were at a greater disadvantage than women.

Tucker often asserted men's status as victims, though he did so more often in the broader context of talking about feminism or affirmative action. Throughout our interviews, he often expressed frustration and a feeling that course readings or discussions not only focused on women's disadvantages, but that they also often ignored what he thought of as disadvantages suffered by (white) men. In talking about his thoughts on empowerment and gender equity, Tucker explained that:

> Girls love it when guys buy them things. That's been my experience. Even girls in class were talking about, "Oh, I don't mind when my boyfriend goes out and buys me shoes." I'm just like, you're basically putting your boyfriend's financial welfare in jeopardy because you want on a pair of shoes when you already have 30. That's the type of thing that's one of those little things that gets overlooked. I know it's not a huge deal, but I feel that women get sexual selection. You know what I'm saying. Guys are going out to bars trying to get girls. Girls get to pick and choose. They are the selectors, and men are the selectees. That's a sexual advantage that women have, I feel.

In this example, Tucker expressed the belief that men are at a disadvantage in having to take the economic burden within male/female relationships and in the common dynamic of feeling that they need to buy gifts for their female partners. He also pointed out the advantage he saw in women getting to have "sexual selection," their ability to choose from a large pool of male suitors. On one hand, Tucker's analysis of "sexual advantage" in this conversation ignores the reality of sexual harassment and rape that play into the

sexual dynamics of men and women, placing many women in constant fear of men. But even if Tucker acknowledged that women's experiences of rape are collectively a greater disadvantage than men's lack of sexual selection, what is significant is that Tucker kept the focus on himself as a man who is affected by what he sees as men's disadvantages. In other words, regardless of whether or not he perceived men's disadvantages to be lesser than, equal to, or greater than women's disadvantages, in this conversation, Tucker made an appeal to self by concentrating on what he saw as his victimhood as a man. In doing so, Tucker effectively shifted the focus away from the topic that was discussed in his class: the economic oppression of women.

Within women's studies courses, students often look at the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1996) of gender and other forms of oppression such as race, sexuality, and class. In the process of learning feminism, Tucker drew upon connections of race and gender as he asserted his victimhood as a white male, while being careful to distance himself from the racist individuals he cites:

> Yeah, I think affirmative action sort of makes it advantageous to be born—I mean, I don't know. You've seen *American History X*,[25] right? I mean I hate to draw points from the racist people in that movie, but a lot of those scenes I feel like are very pertinent to real-life situations. It's a very intelligent movie and it deals with real social issues. When Derek Vinyard's dad is talking to him in a flashback, and he's talking about how this professor used to bring up all these ideas, and his dad sorta got pissed off about it, because he said, you know, that "affirmative blacktion"—which is what he called it—he said "I have a guy working on my staff [as a cop] underneath me who's not as well-trained, didn't do as well on his scores, and he's the guy protecting me. He's a black guy, and he's there because he's black. Even though he has lower scores, and that guy's there to potentially save my life or not, and he's not as well-trained and some other guy who didn't get the job because he's white." Know what I mean? I'm not against affirmative action because it's black or Asian or whatever. It doesn't matter. It's just the fact that people less qualified can get positions because of their skin color. I mean, that's racist, I think, you know? And so that's why I feel like affirmative

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[25] Morrissey, J. (Producer) & Kaye, T. (Director). (1998). *American history X* [motion picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

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action is—I mean, yeah, I want a well-rounded community here as well. I don't want it to be a bunch of white kids. I don't want it to be all anybody. I just want it to be fair for anyone applying here, and I feel like affirmative action takes the fairness out of the application process. I don't see why you have to put down your race when you're applying for certain things because if you check that white box, there's probably a less chance that you'll get the job. I think that's a bunch of crap.

Invoking his identity as a white man, Tucker felt that he was at a disadvantage in a society that supports and utilizes affirmative action.

Instead of focusing on the historical and structural inequalities that necessitate affirmative action, Tucker was concerned about how the system would affect him personally. Similarly, in the previous example on sexual selection, Tucker framed his concern as a feeling that men's suffering is ignored in larger conversations of gendered or raced oppression. Thus, he may have been working within the understanding that while some men experience *hurt* within a gender-segregated society, all women are systemically *oppressed* by this regulation of gender and unequal distribution of power. Yet, when Tucker made a move to bring an analysis of race into his thinking, he pushed further, asserting that women and racial minorities may actually have advantages over men in some instances:

> I just keep quiet. I just sort of think it's so ridiculous sometimes. I mean, I think that in this day and age—this is just my opinion—but I really feel like they don't have that many disadvantages nowadays. I mean if you're black a lot of times, that helps you get jobs. If you're a woman, that helps you get jobs now. Not in every situation, but I feel like they still act like it's twenty years ago, maybe? I think starting with the 90s, and especially nowadays, it's hard to have a serious disadvantage. I mean, I'm sure that there are disadvantages, but they've narrowed the gap a lot. I think the playing field is much more even than it was even 15 years ago. So I feel like when they continue to chime in about these things about how it's still not an equal world—maybe not, I haven't experienced it. I'm not black, I'm not a female, but man, all I know is that if we had had the same scores going in applying for this college, they would have gotten in over me, you know? That's no disadvantage, it's an advantage.

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For Tucker, being white and being male in America today meant that one stands to lose one's power. Because feminism and civil rights have resulted in social programs such as affirmative action, Tucker concluded that such programs and practices have outlived their purpose, currently serving to place white men at a disadvantage. As I will show in the following chapter, Tucker's perspective on the success of feminism also works as an appeal to progress.

Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, men learning feminism often relate course material to themselves in ways that prioritize their own thoughts and feelings over women's perspectives and feminist theory. In this chapter, I have discussed how men make appeals to self through four different discourses: the discourse of guilt, the discourse of taking offense, the discourse of intentionality, and the discourse of victimhood. As with other discourses that I will discuss in subsequent chapters, these discourses often overlap and reinforce one another, working collectively to reinforce male privilege and other forms of privilege. Men are not always conscious that they are using these discourses in women's studies classrooms, and this lack of consciousness enables defensive reactions that enact and reproduce privilege, particularly in the form of male privilege.

APPEALS TO PROGRESS

When participants made appeals to progress, they cited the success (and therefore diminished relevance) of feminism and attributed gendered inequality to the past, enabling them to minimize the concerns discussed by women in their course discussions and readings. In making these appeals to progress, participants claimed either that gender equality has already been achieved in American society, or at the very least, that society is much more gender equal than feminists continue to claim. Alternatively, participants also made appeals to progress by framing inequality as inevitable and therefore seeing progress as finite.

After reading my interviews and reviewing coded data, I categorized appeals to progress as working through three discourses: a *discourse of mark-it*, a *discourse of equity*, and a *discourse of inevitability*. The *discourse of mark-it* is borrowed from Hytten and Warren (2003), who explain that within this discourse, "students appeal to examples of societal changes to show that we have made or are currently making progress" (p. 77). Similarly, within what I call the *discourse of equity*, participants made the case for having experiences that they saw as parallel—if not equal—to women's oppression. In my data, I found that some participants drew on this discourse by making parallels between men's experiences and women's experiences, equating the two and therefore essentially attempting to negate the existance of oppression.[26] Finally, in what I have named the

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[26] Unsurprisingly, the discourse of equity is closely related to the discourse of victimhood. Because it is often premised on the success of feminism and/or affirmative action, the discourse of victimhood usually

discourse of inevitability, participants expressed feelings of helplessness due to their perception that gendered inequality was unavoidable, often framing it as an unfortunate and ugly part of human nature. Viewing gendered oppression as inevitable effectively precluded the possibility of working to end inequality.

"Things are better than they claim they are": The Discourse of Mark-It

Although Hytten and Warren (2003) frame their *discourse of mark-it* in relation to students learning about diversity and racial inequality, I found that it was also present in my participants' perspectives on gender equity. Within the discourse of mark-it, participants compared current gender and social relations with the more obviously oppressive conditions of the past to cite the success of feminism and to establish how far we've come as a society. As an example, I will begin by revisiting a quote from Tucker, situated in the previous chapter as an appeal to self within the discourse of victimhood:

> I just keep quiet. I just sort of think it's so ridiculous sometimes. I mean, I think that in this day and age—this is just my opinion—but I really feel like they don't have that many disadvantages nowadays. I mean if you're black a lot of times, that helps you get jobs. If you're a woman, that helps you get jobs now. Not in every situation, but I feel like they still act like it's twenty years ago, maybe? I think starting with the 90s, and especially nowadays, it's hard to have a serious disadvantage. I mean, I'm sure that there are disadvantages, but they've narrowed the gap a lot. I think the playing field is much more even than it was even 15 years ago.

Tucker's statements here work within a discourse of mark-it because he explicitly compared the current gender and racial dynamics with a time in the past that was less equitable ("they still act like it's twenty years ago"). It is notable that Tucker established the early 1990s as a time when equity became an increasing reality. I do not think it is

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also works as an Appeal to Progress. However, the discourse of victimhood differs from the discourse of equity in two important ways: 1) it is primarily an appeal to the speaker's positionality; and 2) it moves beyond equity to suggest reversed inequality. For these reasons, I made a distinction between these two discourses, although I recognize the lines distinguishing them—and other discourses—are quite blurry.

coincidental that Tucker chose the early 1990s as a frame of reference—given his age, this time period is when Tucker would have his first concrete memories and awareness of gender. Thus, for Tucker, true inequality has always existed *before* him, and he is able to preserve his worldview as living in a nicer and more equitable place than what came before him—because "serious disadvantage[s]" no longer exist, Tucker does not have to worry about whether or not he is contributing to any kind of inequality.

Tucker reinforced this notion of living in a world without blatant sexism in other interviews. In thinking about whether or not he had personally witnessed sexism, he responded:

> I can't really draw for many past experiences where I've been like oh, that is sexism right there. That guy… I mean, I'm sure that I have, but they're not really striking in my memory right now. I feel like in this day and age when I was raised, in the 90s, pretty much, women have had a lot more opportunities and there hasn't been as much outward sexism. Maybe it's more internalized now.

Although someone teaching feminism might be tempted to react to Tucker's comments with frustration or simple disbelief, doing so without also hearing the full breadth of his perspective would miss an important insight that he has offered here. Tucker concluded these comments by acknowledging that even if he can't conjure a concrete example, sexism may still exist in more internalized (as opposed to more overt) forms. What may seem at first to be an outright denial of sexism is at second glance a more nuanced analysis. While Tucker still made an appeal to progress by minimizing concrete and material forms of sexism, he was also aware that while overt sexism may now be generally regarded as inappropriate or "politically incorrect," it may still exist in more covert, internalized forms. The next question that a teacher might want to discuss with

Tucker, perhaps, could be how these remaining internalized forms of sexism continue to have real and externalized effects on women.

If Tucker and other students do not understand these internalized forms of sexism and connect them with external realities of systemic gender inequality, they may be more likely to resort to blaming women for existing inequalities. If, for example, they point to the fact that employers cannot legally discriminate between men and women as evidence that men and women now have equal career opportunities, then students may conclude that women simply aren't taking full advantage of the opportunities given to them. Or, as was the case of some of my participants, they may claim that women are too focused on minor inequalities to see the bigger picture of what is now available to them.[27] Tucker often expressed this concern:

> Things are better than they claim they are. I'm not saying they're equal, but I feel like sometimes a lot of these authors are complaining about things that happened in the past, like they haven't changed one bit last 30 years or so. They have, I think. I'm not saying that it means that it's equal now and that women get paid as well as men and women aren't still treated as sexual objects, because that still happens. But I feel that women have much more rights—or not rights, but you know, opportunities—than they used to. But I feel like they just focus on the negatives more than what they have gained. And so I guess, holding them back is not one single thing. It's men still having the same mentality that we have a higher place in society to some degree, but I feel like it's partly women, too.

In these statements, Tucker took what might be considered a moderate position, placing some of the blame for gender inequality on men. Tucker recognized that men may have a "mentality" rooted in feelings of superiority over women, but he ultimately shifted his focus onto women. In doing so, he accordingly took the focus off of himself as a man and turned it outward. As seen above in the discourse of guilt and the discourse of taking offense, this shift of focus within the discourse of mark-it is another move from the

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[27] I will discuss how this perspective also works in the discourse of strategy in Chapter Five.

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internal (how Tucker and other men might be implicated) to the external (what women

are or should be doing).

Not only does the discourse of mark-it help to obscure the role of men in gender

inequality, but it may also remove *people* from the equation, reifying history as being

responsible for inequality. When I asked Tucker "Where does that inequality come from?

Who's responsible for that?" he replied:

> Again, that's historical traits. I feel like until recently, the last 30 years, women
> still couldn't hold the power that men did. It was pretty rare. Now, I feel like that's
> not the case as much. I realize that men still hold more power than women, but I
> think that there's still been many advancements and opportunities provided to
> women [in an attempt] to even that a little bit. And I feel like in systems like
> welfare, that's the sort of like overlooked, some of the new advantages that
> women may have.

Later, when I asked Tucker where gender inequality comes from, he similarly replied,

"That's a tough one. Again, it's sort of traditions, what we were founded upon—certain

roles for women and certain roles for men." In these comments, Tucker claimed that

"historical traits" and "traditions" were responsible for inequality. In doing so, he

protected his male privilege because the potential agency to effect change was removed

from the discussion: no one seems to be responsible for history or tradition. Further, if

history is something that has passed, there is no way that one can change history.

Tucker believed that in our attempts to right the wrongs of history, we have

effectively turned the tables to put men (and whites) in a position of disadvantage.

Tucker's comments bleed into an overlapping realm inclusive of both the discourse of

mark-it and the discourse of victimhood: again, the bottom line for Tucker is how

programs such as affirmative action will affect him as a white male:

> *Tucker*: I think it's like men originally had much more power than women and
> could get done many more things. I think that gap has narrowed dramatically and

it will continue to, and men still have some advantages. They probably always will have. But I feel like some of the advantages that society and people are trying to make up to women for things that were originally like this, I feel like they're overcompensating and are not compensating for any change that has occurred over time. You understand what I'm saying?

Bob: Yeah. So they're trying to do things to make up for that gap, or that disadvantage, but in doing so, they might actually be putting men at a disadvantage. Is that what you're saying?

Tucker: Yeah. Not to an extreme degree at all. I don't know if that makes sense. It's just sort of like we're almost basing some of the advantages we're giving—I don't want to sound racist or sexist—but some of the advantages that minorities or women receive now—which is good—I feel like some of those advantages are sort of almost like based upon past discrimination to some degree, which is valid. I can see why, but I feel like sometimes it overrides the actual current division between certain genders or cultures.

As in other comments, Tucker felt conflicted about his feelings towards programs such as affirmative action. He acknowledged an overall need for such programs and he did not want to be (or been seen as) racist or sexist; yet he still worked within the discourse of mark-it by referencing the progress we've made as a society. Doing so enabled him to make the case that such programs are outdated, at least to some degree. Tucker felt that because these programs have been based on previous levels of discrimination and inequality, they therefore no longer serve their original purpose. For this reason, he thought that they now actually serve to give an advantage—rather than provide a form of balance or equity—to minorities and women.

As mentioned above, Tucker struggled with his understanding a need for social programs such as affirmative action while also expressing fear and concern that they were possibly outdated and/or harmful to him as a white man. Although Tucker sometimes minimized gender inequality, he consistently acknowledged that it does exist; for Tucker, it was more a matter of degree. At times, moreover, he indicated an

understanding that while a great deal of progress may have occurred in the dynamics of

gender equity, there may also still be more work to be done:

> I can see it shifting. Certainly now, I would say in today's day and age. Women have many more rights than they did even 20 years ago, but still, no woman president and no woman vice president, not nearly as many women senators. You know, the people of power in our country.… Yeah, feminism is still relevant today. I think they should still be able to do the same things and push for equal rights. I mean it's relevant, but I don't know if it's as likely as some of these authors talk about, you know?

Although Tucker reverted to minimizing feminist concerns at the end of these comments,

he began by arguing that while a great deal of progress may have been achieved in the

past few decades, this progress may not indicate that equality now exists between men

and women.

Similar to Tucker, James appealed to progress within the discourse of mark-it, and

he also made distinctions between the kinds of progress that have been made in the past

few decades. James saw a great deal of progress achieved in a larger social scale, but

pointed to individual interactions, particularly within the realm of heterosexual

relationships, as places where inequality was still maintained:

> If there's inequality in the household, it's going to change the way you're living, but I don't think that's something that's a huge thing now. I think that nowadays —I think that's an individual level within an individual household and marriage, the equality thing anyways.… The impact of that is more on an individual level. Now, anyways. Back then when they got the rights to go into the workplace and stuff, I think then it definitely was men who ran the country and see the impact they had on everyone, but now, because they already have the big rights and stuff like that, it's going to be more a conflict within the individual households as far as the role goes. I think we're going to have to sort out in our marriages, rather than in society.

James's appeal to societal progress shifted his focus from systemic levels of inequality to

individuals. His comments here are similar to Tucker's explanation that oppression is less

overt and external and is more "internal" now. On the other hand, his comments also shift

blame to individuals or to their intimate relationships, serving to obscure the systemic workings of oppression by looking sexism as a set of pathological and/or intentional incidents or behaviors. In citing societal progress and making moves to question individuals, someone like James may leave social norms and institutions (such as marriage itself) unquestioned.

"You can't say in every situation we're equal, but as a whole…": The Discourse of Equity

As discussed in the appeals to self in Chapter Three, men learning feminism may search for connections between their own experiences and those of women. Although these connections may be true similarities or may represent false parallels (Schwalbe, 2004), these connections are, nevertheless, attempts at empathy. As Hytten and Warren (2003, p. 71) explain in describing what they call the discourse of connections, these associations are "premised on the belief that at the most fundamental level, we all share some core human connection." Yet, this belief has the potential to obscure important differences. According to Hytten and Warren, the danger within this discourse lies in the possible "relativizing of all differences and putting them on some sort of equal footing" (p. 71). While such personal connections may provide men with empathy for women and a better understanding of their experiences, they may also result in falsely equating men's experiences with women's.

I found that in many cases, participants in my study searched for experiences in their own lives that might help them empathize and understand the experiences of women. In doing so, however, they often discussed ways in which they decided that their experiences as men in the current culture were equal to or greater than women's experiences of oppression. Rather than simply serving to provide an empathic connection

between men and women, within what I call the *discourse of equity*, these connections

actually sometimes served to make participants think that in the culture of the present,

equality has been reached—or at least, that men today are somehow equally oppressed as

women.

Of all my participants, Jimmy most frequently made appeals to progress within

the discourse of equity. Jimmy often spoke of men and women being equal "as a whole,"

explaining that both men and women have advantages and disadvantages, serving to

create an overall balance between the genders:

> In American society, you can't say in every situation we're equal, because that's not the case, but as a whole. I think women are more at an advantage to get into college and other aspects of life and men are at an advantage in others, so as a whole, it kind of averages out. I know in some workplaces, women are still not getting the jobs they deserved, but in other workplaces and men aren't because of affirmative action and stuff. If you weren't looking at the microscopic sociological perspective, but more of the macro, I think it would even out. I haven't done much research, but this is my thesis [for a paper]: that as a whole, our society is as equal as it's going to get before it starts leaning one way or another.

Like Tucker, Jimmy did not view affirmative action as something that contributes to

gender equity. Rather, by increasing employment opportunities for women, affirmative

action therefore puts men at a disadvantage. Simply put, helping one gender must

inherently harm the other. From this perspective, the discrimination that women

experience in the workplace equates with the discrimination that men experience because

of affirmative action. Combined with other things that he considered disadvantages (such

as the fact that men are entering institutions of higher education at lower rates than

women), Jimmy figured that "it kind of averages out" because he thought that men have

roughly an equal number of disadvantages to those experienced by women.

In explaining his understanding of an overall gender equality in American society, Jimmy sometimes offered historical examples of what he saw as men's disadvantages that mirrored those of women:

> But I do know like Banks College was an all-male school until the 70s or something, so that's kinda oppressive, because women couldn't even apply. But then again, I can't apply to Lindsey College, [28] so I guess that's a two-way street, uh, a two-way street with oppression.

In this and other examples in our interviews, I noticed that Jimmy would frequently make an observation about discrimination faced by women, but then counter it with an example of how men are analogously discriminated against.

While Jimmy appealed to a more general example in the statements above, he also saw these patterns in his own life, reflecting on his first work experience and his conversations with friends:

> It's like in the workplace, you know. I worked at an imaging center dealing with MRIs and stuff, and it was a pretty equal, you know, male-to-female ratio in the workplace, but all the receptionists were female, and in accounting, it was all female, and it just kind of struck me as weird that in today's age, I know plenty of people that are in high school who are guys that wouldn't mind being at the front desk of a doctor's office just to get their foot in the door and earn some money, and, uh, it's just kind of strange to see all women at the front desk, you know?… It's just kind of odd that specific positions like secretary or receptionist—the stereotypical positions haven't really changed.… Maybe they just have better typing skills. I don't know.

Here, Jimmy noticed gendered patterns in the workplace and saw them as suggestions that men are also experiencing job discrimination. He observed a scarcity of men working as receptionists and assumed that "plenty" of men would want such a job, but that they aren't being hired for such positions. With this assumption, Jimmy ignored power relations and the social status of these positions in his analysis of gender equity. In

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[28] Banks College and Lindsey College are pseudonyms for local private colleges referenced by Jimmy. Lindsey College is still currently an independent and private college for women.

pointing out a disparity in the fact that many of his male high school friends have been denied the opportunity to work in menial office jobs, he did not consider the overall lower wages that women receive in the workplace (United States Census Bureau, 2005) or the relative lack of alternative options that have been available to women who may be working in such positions. Although his male high school friends might be less likely to find this kind of employment, women of all ages have historically had fewer career options and have been persuaded (if not forced) into low-skilled and low-paid labor.

Part of the reason that discrimination equaled out "as a whole" for Jimmy was that he saw it as taking on different meanings for different people. Jimmy often appealed to the fact that discrimination was a matter of perspective, dependent on the beholder's subjectivity. For him, certain situations or gender dynamics had the potential to be viewed and felt differently for men and for women. I quote him at length here to offer insight into his perspective:

> There are so many factors that go into something as complex as the wage gap and job segregation that it's difficult to analysis it quantitatively. But qualitatively, you can say that women are at a disadvantage overall. The more and more I look at it—I said it earlier that as a whole, if you took all of American society, women with their advantages and men with their advantages, it would be close to equality. I would still say that men have an advantage in American society, but we're a lot closer than people think. If you really take an impartial view I guess, and just kind of look at both genders and say, well, there are advantages here and there are advantages here, but that's too hard to do. It's too subjective, and you can't really say who's at an advantage here or there because somebody's disadvantage may look like an advantage for the other gender. Let's say the ERA. If it was passed 15 or 20 years ago, or if it was passed now, women would be in the draft. They would have to register for the draft. I had to register for the draft when I turned 18. I look at that as a disadvantage because I don't want to get shot. A woman might look at it and say that she's at a disadvantage, because she doesn't even get the opportunity to register for the draft. Personally, she can have my spot. I don't really care to go to war. I personally do not want to get shot. That sort of advantage there, that can be looked at and reversed, depending on who you ask. So it's too subjective to say as a whole, as a society, how close we are [to equality].

In the quote above, Jimmy moved from saying that "women are at a disadvantage overall" to asserting that because you we can look at a situation from more than one perspective, competing perspectives effectively negate the possibility of oppression: "It's too subjective, and you can't really say who's at an advantage here or there because somebody's disadvantage may look like an advantage for the other gender." Within this perspective, equality is simply not a possibility—as above, it seems that any given situation must inherently serve as an advantage for one gender and a disadvantage for another. As was often the case, Jimmy would begin by acknowledging the existence of oppression, ceding an overall disadvantage for women. But his subsequent thoughts would shift the conversation away from the oppression of women and turn instead to how men were also discriminated against. Regardless of whether or not Jimmy ultimately believed that women are the victims of gender oppression, what is significant is that through the discourse of equity, Jimmy frequently shifted the focus of the conversation from women to men.

Within his comments in the discourse of equity, I found one facet of Jimmy's comments particularly interesting and important for teachers to consider when teaching feminism. At the time of our interviews, Jimmy was writing a paper on the equality of men and women, and he wanted to look specifically at masculinity and femininity to determine which qualities were more valued in American society. Although Jimmy appealed to an overall equality between men and women, one of the specific disadvantages for men that he was very passionate and frustrated about was the fact that men have been highly discouraged from nurturing their "feminine" side, which he felt limited their options of expression and interaction:

It's a toss-up, which is why I say it's an average. You look at a specific situation, and you can see inequalities on both sides at different situations, and I think that as a whole society would be—it would average out to be equal or close to equal I would think. And here's another point I want to make about that: it's more accepted for a woman to take on masculine qualities and still retain feminine qualities so they have three choices, whereas men have even less because the society kind of bounds them to being masculine superior or masculine subordinate. If you're going to be feminine, then you're going to be labeled gay. That's sad, because as a man, I don't think we have as many choices because of the bounds society puts on us.

Here, Jimmy recognized the relationship between homophobia and sexism, a dynamic generally accepted within feminist scholarship and activism (see Kimmel, 2005; Pharr, 1988). He also expressed frustration with the gender norms placed on expression, particularly the fact that it is more acceptable for women to take on masculine characteristics than it is for men to act feminine. Finally, he relayed a desire for men and boys to be able to choose more feminine characteristics as part of their personalities and practices, another move that many feminists would make.

In thinking about masculinity and femininity, Jimmy had a vision of true gender equality, one in which men could possess stereotypically feminine qualities and women could posses traditionally masculine characteristics. Although I don't believe he would expressly advocate for full androgyny in society, his comments suggested that he felt that gender norms limit the emotional and social expression of men, and that both men and women could benefit from expanded gender norms. In fact, he indicated that he had put quite a bit of thought into such a possibility outside of the classroom:

How can men become more feminine? I think it has to be at a very young age that men learned that you don't have to act out violently, they could take a sensitivity courses. I think there's a lot of men who have creativity and are very artistic, and that's kind of frowned upon in a masculine society, so I don't think it would necessarily—I think what male society is scared of is that it will cause more homosexuality in men and guys who are less athletic people. I think that's not the case, because they underestimate how well-rounded men can be. So if we

emphasized more music and art and had sensitivity courses to get them in touch with their emotions and to train their minds to think more like women, then they'll have both sides of the equation, much like women do.… I think if we started at an early age, they would still develop those masculine qualities, but they would also develop feminine qualities. I think women were already exposed to that in the 60s and 70s. Young girls were exposed to more sports than they used to be. And then there is the sexual revolution, which was an older age thing, obviously, but we talked about that in one of the articles. I can't even remember. But I think that was important in making men and women more equal.

While the discourse of equity may serve to offer false parallels and distract attention away from women's experiences of oppression, it may also provide an opportunity for critical conversations about masculinity. For Jimmy, and perhaps for other men learning feminism, the discourse of equity may also provide an opening for men to see how they might become more personally invested in feminism.

"There always will be oppression": The Discourse of Inevitability

As noted in the discourses above, my participants often referenced the significant progress made in equalizing gender relations and social power in America in the past century. However, in discussing gendered inequality, discrimination, and oppression with my participants, I also found that many participants felt that gender inequality and other forms of oppression would always exist in one form or another. When speaking and thinking within the *discourse of inevitability*, participants framed oppression and inequality as unavoidable, foreclosing the possibility of achieving equity between men and women.

In combining general appeals to progress with the discourses of equity and of victimhood, some participants thought that if we approached equality, it was inevitable that progress would go too far and the scales would be tipped to make women dominant over men. It often seemed to me that they were either unable to envision a world based on equality, or they harbored some degree of subconscious—if not willful—blindness in

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relation to seeing the possibility of such a world. Both options seemed likely to me in light of the privileges that participants would have to give up if gender equality were achieved.

In a broader context, appealing to the inevitability of oppression was not limited to participants who benefited from white heterosexual male privilege. Julius, a participant who was overtly enthusiastic about learning feminism, identified as a gay Black man. In his first year of college, he grew up in a house where poverty and violence were commonplace. His positionality as a Black, non-heterosexual, and outwardly "effeminate" man serves to prevent him from reaping all the benefits of male privilege. Still, in his interviews, he thought that despite improvements in race, gender, and sexual relations in the U.S., other forms of discrimination and oppression would continue to surface:

> *Julius*: It's so sad that there always has to be somebody oppressed. Why can't there be no oppression? But it's kind of like there always has to be if you look back. There always has been.
>
> *Bob*: Do you think there always has to be, though?
>
> *Julius*: I think that the way our society works now. There always will be oppression.
>
> *Bob*: Why?
>
> *Julius*: Because that's how society—because your people oppress us. [Laughs] No, I'm just joking. It is not even necessarily like that now. Like in Darfur, it's Arabs and Blacks, Africans. I always think there'll be oppressed people. If it's not Latinos, it might be Arab-Americans, because Arabs are having a lot of trouble in Europe with the whole terrorism thing and stuff like that—I'm learning this in my other class. So yeah, I think it will always be here. I just do.

In our conversation above, Julius viewed oppression as mutable but durable. Although he thought that it might evolve to include different people with differing experiences, for Julius, it will always exist.

Tucker and other participants had a similar view of oppression. For Tucker, whose women's studies class looked at other forms of oppression besides gender, overall equality was simply an unrealistic goal for feminism. Tucker thought that while some forms of oppression might improve, at the same time others would inevitably get worse. For example, he frequently cited progress in gender equity, but he often remarked that racism has been simultaneously getting worse in America. Especially when the goals of feminism were broadened to include working against all forms of oppression, Tucker felt that such a broad and overarching strategy was unrealistic, if not impossible:

> I mean, we don't live in an equal society, and we never will, I don't think. I mean unless we want to be communists. That would be equal to some degree. People are always going to be rich and people are always going to be poor. There's always gonna—white people founded this country. Of course there were Native Americans, but [white people] founded the modern structure of the way that the country is, and they're going to continue to have that. It shouldn't be this way, but they're probably going to continue to have—based on numbers, you know—to have a greater influence on decision making, things that happen and the way society thinks. That sucks, but I just feel like that's the way it is…. We should do what we can to make it better. But if the goal is to make everything equal for both sexes, all races, all religions, I think that's a flawed goal. It's not flawed, but it's unrealistic, you know? So we should do what we can to make things better, and I feel like they are a lot better. I feel like that's what a lot of these feminist leaders aren't looking at. Things are a lot better. I'm not saying they're perfect, but you can't deny that things are a lot better than they were 20, 30, 100 years ago. It seems like we're moving in the right path. That's not saying that things are perfect, and that women don't get raped and women don't get beat and they don't get paid as much and all that stuff, but you know? At least we're moving in the right direction.

Tucker recognized the injustice of the white supremacist infrastructure upon which this country was founded, but he asserted that it was so entrenched as to be unchangeable.

Whether or not he sees this inequality as desirable or moral, for Tucker, might has—and will continue to—made right: "It shouldn't be this way, but they're probably going to continue to have—based on numbers, you know—to have a greater influence on decision making, things that happen and the way society thinks. That sucks, but I just feel like that's the way it is." My reading is that because he benefits from this dynamic, Tucker can both acknowledge that the situation "sucks" and at the same time see it as inevitable. If this inequality is inevitable, Tucker and other men do not have to claim responsibility for their participation in this dynamic; nor do they have to change their behavior and possibly lose their privilege. He also invoked the discourse of mark-it to essentially reinforce reasons for inaction: his final comments suggest that the discourse of mark-it ("you can't deny that things are a lot better than they were 20, 30, 100 years ago") served to offer him some degree of hope when faced with the discourse of inevitability. Although oppression will always exist, we can at least find solace in the fact that things are getting better.

In explaining why oppression is inevitable, participants sometimes appealed to biology as a root cause of inequality. Tucker's women's studies class studied the "nature versus nurture" argument in looking at gender. Although Tucker thought that social and biological factors were both influential in creating gender differences, he often suggested that biology is primary: "I can see some of the arguments for [culture being influential], and I can see how it could affect it, but I feel like gender is much more driven by biology, I think." In another interview he stated:

> We talked about how men are more likely to be injured or die early, to be murdered. Just that men are more in danger, you know? We talked about the traits that signify men—they're strong, sexually aggressive. You know. And then we talked about health issues, that sort of go along with that: injuries, STDs, things

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that are more associated with men. [...] And then we talked about whether men really are this way or if men do that because that's what society deems masculine. And so we talked about that a little bit. Again it could be a combination of both, of men acting to more aggressive and more competitive, stuff like that but also, I think that's just the way we are to some degree.

As Tucker's comments suggest, seeing gender differences as biological works within the discourse of inevitability because when one appeals to biology, one appeals to what is natural and inherent about humanity. If gender differences are as natural as, say, eye color or left-handedness, then we working to change them may seem futile.[29]

Even when participants shifted their thinking from a possible biological basis for oppression to looking at the ways in which gender differences are socialized, they still sometimes framed these differences as inevitable. In a conversation about gender differences in communication, Jimmy felt justified that he sometimes spoke in ways that sometimes upset the women in his life:

[These readings made me feel] a little more justified like my actions in life. There's sociological evidence that how I act is not just my personality. So I felt justified in my actions more so than with oppression and male privilege, white privilege. I felt like I do necessarily do it. People were looking at me like I was a male and white and automatically have these ideas of oppression and me being privileged. And yet I couldn't help that.… I shouldn't have been feeling that guilty almost when having these conversations growing up and I would present a solution to a problem. And they would get mad and frustrated at me, the females. I would get upset and feel a little guilty like, what did I do wrong, or like I committed a crime. After reading this, it's like okay it's not my fault necessarily it's more a societal problem or not, this is really a problem of social differences, whether it's biological based by origin or not, I don't know.

For Jimmy, a sociological basis for behavior can be equally as powerful and inevitable as a biological basis. Regardless of the origin of gender differences, Jimmy concluded from the readings and class discussions that he wasn't necessarily at fault when he said things that were unhelpful or offensive. As the quote above illustrates, the discourse of

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[29] Though, given the ever-expanding biotechnology within the field of genetics, one might consider possibilities for genetically working towards gender equity.

inevitability serves as a buffer for the discourse of guilt; if these differences and inequalities are impossible to avoid, then there is no reason to feel guilty for perpetuating them.

As he continued to think about gender inequality and hypothesize about his aforementioned class essay, Jimmy worked within the discourse of inevitability in constructing his thesis. Because he viewed oppression as unavoidable, Jimmy viewed progress in gender equity as something that would eventually result in women having an advantage over men, a perspective that he shared with James. In talking with me about his paper, Jimmy said:

> I think women's lib and all these different movements have really helped women out in the workplace and everything else, but it's got to be a lot more work to be done obviously. But if there is too much work, you got to realize that if they don't handle it right, women will be in a position where it's just a role reversal. You get a state where the genders are reversed. It's so complicated. I think this transitional state will stay longer than anyone can predict. I think it will be more and more equal, but eventually, it will shift one way or another, because that's the way that society has shown itself.… I think in the future that women are going to be the dominant gender and men will be a little bit subordinate. It won't be as obvious, but I think there'll be sort of a reversal. It won't be as obvious as men being dominate to women, but I think we're in a transitional phase.

Although Jimmy saw progress in women becoming more socially equal to men, his fear was that this progress would go too far, and women would surpass men and make them subordinate. While he predicted that this subordination would be less "obvious" (another move toward progress), Jimmy nonetheless viewed gender inequality as inevitable.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which appeals to progress work within three different discourses: the discourse of mark-it, the discourse of equity, and the discourse of inevitability. Although the three discourses are distinct enough for me to

name them separately, we have also seen some ways in which they overlap. Such overlaps are not unique within appeals to progress. As discussed above, the discourse of victimhood and the discourse of equity often overlap: in appealing to the progress made in society, participants were often concerned how such progress would affect them personally as white men. In other cases, discourses may work against each other, but still ultimately serve to enact and reinforce privilege. For example, the discourse of mark-it may provide hope in light of the unavoidable inequalities seen in the discourse of inevitability. Both discourses, however, may serve to detract men's attention away from acknowledging gender inequality and seeking ways to work with women and against oppression.

APPEALS TO AUTHORITY

When participants made appeals to authority, they drew upon a masculine notion of objectivity (de Beauvoir, 1952) and assumed a position of judging feminism as an overly subjective or misguided set of thoughts. Men in my study made appeals to authority within two discourses: the *discourse of objectivity* and the *discourse of strategy*. In the discourse of objectivity, men explicitly criticized what they saw as the overly subjective nature of feminist thought and discounted the validity of women's personal experiences. Ironically, participants often drew authority from their own subjective experiences to counter feminist subjectivity; however, the difference for them was that as men, they felt that they were on the side of objectivity and therefore validity. Thus, they saw themselves as thinking through an objective outlook from which they could form rational criticisms of feminism. From this position of masculine authority and assumed objectivity, participants also made appeals to authority by criticizing feminist strategy as being misguided or illogical. I refer to this critical focus on feminist goals and methods as the discourse of strategy.

"They're not really as objective as they think they are": The Discourse of Objectivity

One of the primary ways in which participants made appeals to authority was by characterizing feminist thought as too subjective to be granted authority as valid or true. To understand the basis for why men thought and spoke within the discourse of objectivity, we can look to Simone de Beauvoir (1952) to understand a fundamental

assumption of most modern feminism: the way in which men (and the masculine) assume

the side of objectivity. As de Beauvoir writes in her introduction to *The Second Sex*,

"man represents both the positive and the neutral" (xxi). Men have been and continue to

be the dominant sex; thus, an individual man is likely to consider his body as "a direct

and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively" (pp.

xxi-xxii).[30] In my interviews with some of the men in my study, I felt that because of

their socialization as men, they inherited this assumed position of objectivity and

perpetuated it through their assessment of feminism and in their conversations with me.

From this assumed position of objectivity, Jimmy, James, Tucker, and Edward all

spoke within and in reference to the discourse of objectivity. Edward in particular

asserted that a majority of men will be more likely to accept fact-based and supposedly

non-subjective readings and discussions rather than first-hand descriptions of personal

experience. Tucker and James both noted on several occasions that they preferred the

scientific and historical readings in their respective classes, what James called "more

factual, historical-based stuff." In an early interview, James was both disappointed in and

critical of the women authors he and his classmates read, referring to what he saw as their

bias against men. He framed this bias in relation to the notion of objectivity:

> [the professor] set it up saying, "I've had men take this course and say it's not
> biased at all, not man hating." And I thought, okay, that's good. And then as the
> semester progressed, and as we started reading stuff, I was like… they're not
> really as objective as they think they are. Which I thought was very interesting.

Like other participants, James prioritized objectivity as something important in the

classroom, and he also framed it in relation to himself and his concern that women's

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[30] An interesting parallel to race and assumed authority can be found in Richard Dyer's (1997) *White*:
"There is no more powerful positiong than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to
speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that - they can only speak for their race....
This assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off from saying that whites are people
whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture" (p. 2).

subjectivity was primarily (perhaps even inherently) against men or—as we shall see with

other participants—against men's subjectivity. The latter possibility refers to an

assumption that if two perspectives conflict with one another, one or both of them must

be untrue. Within the discourse of objectivity, such apparently conflicting narratives

cannot comfortably coexist.

In addition to being critical of the lack of objectivity in the course, James also

dismissed certain course readings as being overly subjective and not factual enough to

merit either his belief in them or even perhaps academic consideration. He contrasted the

more historical and scientific texts in his course readings with texts that placed stronger

emphasis on women's experience:

> [*Our Bodies, Ourselves*][31] is supposed to be like a manual for the female body,
> and that was interesting. I didn't have any problem with that. Because they were
> just giving science.… That book wasn't too bad. I can't remember verbatim what
> it was, but I think one of them, it seemed like they were all writing one chapter
> about women just being themselves. I was like, okay. You could have done that in
> two pages. "This is an Asian. Don't make fun of my droopy eyelids." They went
> through each [race]. They had an Oriental woman, an African-American woman,
> and then a bunch of white women, and they were all writing [about themselves]—
> I was just like, you're taking all this [time] to do that? It was just kinda redundant.

As opposed to the text mentioned above, James was interested in texts that he felt were

based in "science." He discounted other readings—in this case, those that were grounded

in women's personal experiences—as being unnecessary and frivolous. My sense was

that because James considered himself to be liberal and free of racial and gendered

prejudice, he felt as if such narratives could not offer him anything educational. Because

he didn't see himself as needing to be convinced about feminism, James spent much time

in our conversations criticizing aspects of the course that he did not like, including course

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[31] Boston Women's Health Book Collective. (2005). *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*.
    New York: Touchstone.

readings that were critical of men, particularly because he did not personally identify as a

man who was contributing to the sexist oppression of women. What he desired was a

more scientific basis for holding onto what he saw as a liberal, non-sexist, and rational

positionality for himself.

Even when the books read in James's class were more based on science or

research, he valued empirical, fact-based research over qualitative work, which he

criticized for being too grounded in subjective experience:

> And we had *The Body Project*.[32]… And it was written by this probably at least
> moderate-conservative woman who talked about the way the media and society
> sets everything up and makes girls care so much about their bodies, and how they
> obsess over it, and write about it. Where it seems like the only thing they're good
> for [is their looks]. I can definitely see it as something that made sense, but her
> main source was like diaries from like four or five girls, and that's not very
> representative.

Here again, James dismisses a text for not being scientific enough. In this case, the text

was Joan Jacobs Brumberg's (1998) *The Body Project*, a text that one might call "popular

scholarship" given the book's crossover appeal and the author's credentials as a professor

at Cornell University. To James, though, the book's small sample size resulted in a work

that was limited by its subjectivity and lack of scientific rigor.

Tucker sometimes seemed even more critical of feminist scholarship than James.

Although Tucker said he "didn't really see eye to eye with" many of the feminist authors

his class read, he expressed interest in an excerpt from Barrie Thorne's (1993) *Gender

Play* that was included in his course textbook:

> It was in the feminist book,[33] but it was written by a man, which sort of amazed
> me because I thought these other readings were written by these feminist women,

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[32] Brumberg, J. J. (1998). The body project: An intimate history of American girls. New York: Vintage.

[33] Taylor, V., Whittier, N., & Rupp, L. J. (2006). *Feminist frontiers (7th ed.)*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

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who I didn't really see eye to eye with. And this one made more sense, and it was written by a man. It was more sensible in my opinion. Less, uh, driven by emotions and feelings and stuff, more scientific, I thought. So, I liked it more.

Ironically, Tucker claimed to like the selection from *Gender Play* in relation to the fact that he assumed it was written by a man. Barrie Thorne, however, is a woman who is also a well-known sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley. I cannot claim for sure that Tucker thought that the text was "less driven by emotions and feelings" than other course readings because he read the text under the assumption that the author was a man. I do think it is likely, however, that his overall perception of the text was colored by this assumption that the author was male. It seemed to me that Tucker linked male authorship with being "less driven by emotions and feelings"—in other words, with being more scientific and objective—and therefore was more receptive to the text itself.

Similar to both Tucker and James, Jimmy drew upon the discourse of objectivity in his discussions of certain course readings. In particular, Jimmy referred to a perceived lack of objectivity in the aforementioned discussion of Marilyn Frye's (1982) analysis of door-opening and chivalry in the discourse of intentionality:

> I think it's a little bit too opinionated. I do think some of our language needs to change, but some of the examples they gave were a little too extreme. And then the little traditional things like opening the door. Is that really oppressing or is that showing respect? I open doors for girls and guys and I don't think I'm privileged and they're being oppressed. I don't think it's like comparing them to a disabled person, which the disabled article gave as an example.

In the example above, Jimmy's concerns with the subjective nature of feminist thought work in conjunction with the discourse of intentionality. As mentioned before, Jimmy's focus in the context of door-opening is on the fact that he doesn't feel—or intend to be— oppressive when he opens the door for a woman. Working also within the discourse of objectivity, Jimmy concludes that because a situation can be viewed in these different and

opposing ways, there is no validity to the assertion that the dynamic can be viewed as

contributing to inequality or oppression. Paradoxically, however, he also prioritizes his

own subjectivity as being valid. The irony inherent in the discourse of objectivity is

apparent in Jimmy's comments above. In these statements, Jimmy begins with a critique

that the reading's critique of chivalry is "too opinionated," but then repeatedly draws

upon his own opinion ("I don't think…") to make his point. Here again, we can look to

de Beauvoir's words to explain why this paradox might make sense to Jimmy: as a man,

he feels that he is objective; he "is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other"

(xxii).

In other conversations, Jimmy repeated this frustration with seemingly

contradictory perspectives, concluding that any analysis of gendered inequality would be

too subjective to offer a true or valid representation of reality. Yet he constantly fell back

on the conclusion that the existence of opposing subjectivities necessarily means we can't

draw *any* conclusions about whether or not men and women suffered the same amount of

discrimination or oppression, thus leaving the status quo intact. For example, we can

revisit Jimmy's take on women and the draft to see how his comments from the discourse

of equity also work within the discourse of objectivity. When asked if men or women

currently suffer more discrimination, Jimmy responded:

> If you really take an impartial view, I guess, and just kind of look at both genders
> and say, well, there are advantages here and there are advantages here—but that's
> too hard to do. It's too subjective, and you can't really say who's at an advantage
> here or there because somebody's disadvantage may look like an advantage for
> the other gender. Let's say the ERA. If it was passed 15 or 20 years ago, or if it
> was passed now, women would be in the draft. They would have to register for
> the draft. [As a male] I had to register for the draft when I turned 18. I look at that
> as a disadvantage because I don't want to get shot. A woman might look at it and
> say that she's at a disadvantage, because she doesn't even get the opportunity to
> register for the draft. Personally, she can have my spot. I don't really care to go to

war. I personally do not want to get shot. That sort of advantage there, that can be looked at and reversed, depending on who you ask. So it's too subjective to say as a whole, as a society, how close we are [to equality].

In trying to decide which gender experiences more discrimination, Jimmy began by implying that answering the question would be possible only if one could take an objective view of the situation. In Jimmy's estimation here, the fact that women are being discriminated against contradicts the fact that he doesn't want the rights that they are fighting for. His logic concludes that because he doesn't want them, the rights aren't really worth having; thus, the fact that they are denied to women isn't a form of discrimination. Edward P. Jones (2003) describes how this kind of logic privileges those with more power in his novel, *The Known World*. In one chapter, the character Calvin appeals to an adult, Fern Elston, after hitting another child:

> I didn't hit him all that hard, Mrs. Elston. I hit him with a soft lick, a baby lick. I didn't hurt him. Fern had come up to Calvin and slapped him and shook him by the shoulders until Calvin cried. "Why are you crying, Calvin? I just gave you a baby lick." When both boys had stopped crying, Fern said gently to Calvin, "The hitter can never be the judge. Only the receiver of the blow can tell you how hard it was, whether it would kill a man or make a baby just yawn." (181)

Instead of concluding that women's feelings of disadvantage may have merit because they are positioned as "receiver[s] of the blow" and can therefore "tell you how hard it was," Jimmy countered their experiences with his own feelings of being disadvantaged in the situation. Again, because he was frustrated by conflicting accounts of the situation, he moved to invalidate women's claims to inequality. In making this move, Jimmy and other men ultimately privilege a form of objectivity that benefits men by keeping men and women in their separate positions within the gendered status quo. If Jimmy sees inequality as something "left up to the eye of the beholder," then he may feel powerless to do anything to change it. On the other hand, there is the possibility that Jimmy may

instead use his understanding of subjectivity to grant validity to those who feel they

suffer in a given situation. As we saw in Chapter Three, Jimmy appealed to his intentions

and recognized at times that they did not match the consequences of his actions and that

situations may appear different depending on the perspective: "I think that oppression is

just left up to the eye of the beholder, you know? Whoever thinks they're being

oppressed, they're being oppressed." If Jimmy was able to find comfort with subjective

accounts and the possibility of conflicting perspectives, then perhaps he could release the

masculine notion of objectivity and instead "let the receiver of the blow be the judge"

(Jones, 2003, p. 181).

Like Jimmy, Tucker, and James, Edward struggled with the balance between

objectivity and subjectivity in his women's studies class. In my judgment, Edward was

more self aware of objectivity as a masculine phenomenon. In thinking of how to

approach other men with feminist concerns, Edward recognized a need to appeal to

objectivity. However, for Edward, working within an objective and empirical basis was

not the final goal of such a strategy. Edward viewed hard facts and a more cerebral

strategy as necessary in convincing men of the validity of feminist thought before starting

to work with them on a more emotional and introspective basis:

> I think men have to see it on a thinking level first because they're so
> unaccustomed to doing things emotionally that you have to talk in our language,
> which is the language of thinking and rationality. And then you have to express
> [the fact] that emotion is good through a very well-reasoned approach. It's an
> interesting, convoluted way to view it, but that's how you have to portray it.

In his approach to working with men, Edward recognized that men learning feminism

will likely approach the subject with concerns about objectivity, which is a particularly

masculine notion. He recognized that men learn to speak and think in a language "of

thinking and rationality." If men learn feminism only through this language of rationality, they may unconsciously resist feminist material (refusing to engage with it personally and emotionally) while feeling confident that they are fully engaging with it (on a more cerebral and rational level). Ultimately, Edward wanted other men to move beyond the intellectual realm of thought and into an exploration of their emotions; he felt, however, that—as paradoxical as it may seem—most men first need to be convinced by rational and factual information before they would be able to doing so.

In my concluding chapter, I will return to a discussion of potentially effective methods in teaching men feminism and revisit Edward's view that working with men on a fact-based, intellectual basis may provide a foundation from which to effectively encourage introspection. Before doing so, I will discuss methods that participants found ineffective in teaching them feminism in women's studies classes. The following section will discuss how the discourse of strategy keeps men focused on the methods instead of the messages of feminism.

"It's just not specific enough": The Discourse of Strategy

As discussed above, men may largely focus on the ways in which feminism is presented in women's studies classrooms or course readings, which may serve to distract them from the actual message being delivered. As Edward explained, strategy is important in thinking of how to effectively teach feminism to men in ways that might foster receptivity and possibly introspection. In learning feminism, men may criticize feminist strategy, serving to shift their focus away from the content of what is being taught in their women's studies classes. These conversations about method create what I call the discourse of strategy. Within this discourse, participants emphasized the ways in

which feminism was taught in their courses, or they criticized feminism more generally

for being misguided or impractical in working to achieve its goals. The discourse of

strategy worked similarly to other discourses in serving to shift focus away from men's

privilege and to provide a framework and language for men to criticize feminism. It is

specifically an appeal to authority because in criticizing feminist strategy, men in my

study assumed a position of objectivity and assumed that they had the authority to be

critical.

James's comments about his course readings represent how the discourse of

strategy and the discourse of objectivity both work as appeals to authority and sometimes

overlap and reinforce one another:

> But the content—not necessarily the articles, like that one, were sort of iffy, but documentation stuff, like the book about the movements and the fight for equal rights and pay, that was interesting. I can agree with that, because that's what did and didn't happen, and why they were trying to go forth, and why NOW[34] formed, and who did it, and the controversy and conflict—the lavender menace[35] and all that. That was interesting, but—I don't know. Some of the stuff, like women putting their opinions down and stuff was kind of like—[grimace] hmm.

James's assessment works within discourse of objectivity in that he valued

"documentation stuff" over "women putting their opinions down" in course readings. At

the same time, his comments worked within the discourse of strategy because James

situated them in the context of how the class was or was not effective or influential to

him. As I mentioned before, James saw himself as agreeing with feminism in general.

This positioning of himself as a non-sexist male seemed to be an *a priori* assumption that

James brought to our conversations. What interested me about these conversations,

however, was the fact that despite this assumption (or perhaps because of it), James spent

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[34] The National Organization for Women.

[35] The "lavender menace" is a phrase generally attributed to Betty Friedan in reference to lesbian feminists.

quite a bit of time criticizing his women's studies course. Often, he and Tucker both used our interviews as an opportunity to vent their frustrations about their course. In James's interviews, in particular, his criticisms were not directed so much towards the message of feminism as much as the ways in which it was delivered in by women in course readings and discussions.

In reference to an aforementioned course reading, Joan Jacobs Brumberg's *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (1998), James focused on the author's logic and was specifically critical of the strategy used in making her case to the reader:

> I can definitely see what she was saying, and I can see why she was saying it, so it didn't make me mad. It's just like I questioned some of her logic sometimes. I could definitely see she had a set point, it was just pulling bits and pieces to support it. I was like, eh, if I can see through it that bad, so—It was fine in the book. It didn't offend me or anything. I can agree with, you know, all the objectification in the media, but she went about the wrong means of portraying it.

Again, while this example's implication of author bias clearly works within the discourse of objectivity by assuming a bias on the part of the author, it is also a clear example of the discourse of strategy. James's phrase "I can agree … but she went about the wrong means of portraying it" served for me as a representation of his overall attitude towards his women's studies class in our conversations: he saw himself as agreeing with feminism generally speaking, but he was often critical of the way in which it was presented in his class.

Similar to James, Tucker often expressed frustration with the ways in which feminism was taught within his women's studies course. During most of our interviews, I sensed that Tucker wanted to learn and understand feminism while simultaneously placing emphasis on what he saw as faults in course readings or discussions. When I

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asked Tucker about the pedagogy of his course—specifically, how much his course

focused on intellectual, emotional, or action-based learning—he was most critical in

feeling that the action-based learning was misguided in its emphasis. Often these

criticisms were based on a frustration that easy solutions were not apparent, a frustration

he likely shared with many classmates, male and female. As he stated in a later interview:

"It's sort of like they point out these things, and then they haven't done a great job of

incorporating these things that they see into the real-world today."

Tucker sometimes criticized the emotional nature of course readings, but he also

felt that the course remained too hypothetical and not as practical as he hoped:

> The course focused much more on the thoughts and intellectual, like what these
> different experts or whatever say—feminist movement leaders—about the way it
> was and maybe this is why [inequality exists], and it needs to change. So I think
> they sort of fall short of the actions realm. They don't really—they're saying these
> things need to change, because there's inequalities between the sexes, but they
> don't really—some of them do, I guess, but they're not really well-rounded
> thoughts about how a normal person can go out and make changes. Some of them
> cover that a little bit. It's mostly focusing on—I felt the class was focused on
> "okay, here's men and here's women, and it sucks that it's this way, so let's
> complain about it." That's basically what I feel like most of the class—if I to sum
> up the class in one sentence, it would probably be it.

Like James, Tucker expressed overall agreement with the content of feminist course

readings. Also similar to James, however, Tucker criticized the overall strategy of

feminism and women's studies. I think that because he felt targeted as someone who

benefits from gendered inequalities, Tucker became frustrated by the fact that he didn't

find easy solutions for ending inequality. More specifically, Tucker wanted to end

gendered inequality, but at the same time he did not want to give up the privileges that he

benefited from. In particular, Tucker expressed concern that the course didn't tell him

"how a normal person can go out and make changes." Again implicitly invoking the

masculine norm (a normal person) introduced by Beauvoir (1952), this statement implied

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a fear of having to make sacrifices and give up privileges in the name of equality. In sum, Tucker wanted to work towards gender equality, but he wanted to do so as a "normal person," implying that he did not want to go to the extremes of actually being (or being seen as) a feminist.

Tucker echoed this fear in other statements about feminists' strategy in working against ending inequality. If we revisit Tucker's concerns from the discourse of inevitability, we can see how he is critical of feminism's broad focus on ending inequality. Here, Tucker uses appeals to progress as a basis for criticizing feminist goals with the discourse of strategy:

> I mean, we don't live in an equal society, and we never will, I don't think.… We should do what we can to make it better. But if the goal is to make everything equal for both sexes, all races, all religions, I think that's a flawed goal. It's not flawed, but it's unrealistic, you know? So we should do what we can to make things better and I feel like they are a lot better. I feel like that's what a lot of these feminist leaders aren't looking at. Things are a lot better.

In appealing to his belief that inequality is inevitable, Tucker concluded that feminism must be fundamentally flawed in its efforts if it wants to end all forms of inequality. He also then shifted his focus to feminists themselves, criticizing them for not acknowledging and appreciating the progress that has been made in gender equality.

Tucker's turn to criticizing feminists is significant, because it allowed him to move away from feminism itself and enabled him to place some degree of blame on individual women for not taking the right tactic in feminist activism:

> I feel like they just focus on the negatives more than what they have gained. And so I guess, holding them back is not one single thing. It's men still having the same mentality that we have a higher place in society to some degree, but I feel like it's partly women, too. Maybe they have the wrong mindset as to how to go about these changes or something? I guess they need to have a more concerted effort on what—it's like they pick and choose all these little negatives that are going on that certainly exist, but if you want things to change, I feel like you need

a concerted effort towards "okay, change this" and then "work on changing this" as opposed to "this is unfair," "this is unfair," "this is unfair." I think that's the main thing that would give more equality between the two sexes.

As in the previous example, Tucker used appeals to progress in these statements to justify his criticism of feminism within the discourse of strategy. He felt that because women "focus on the negatives," they are shortsighted in their strategy and "pick and choose" minor concerns instead of making a "concerted effort." Tucker thought that feminism would be more effective for and attractive to men if women could offer more concrete and practical solutions for ending inequality. Such wishful thinking is easier conceived than executed, of course, yet Tucker did not seem to realize that a lack of available concrete solutions does not invalidate the very existence of inequality.

Although Tucker's criticisms of feminist strategy work similarly to other discourses—to preserve male privilege—they also represent what I felt was an understandable concern on Tucker's part that learning and accepting feminism can be overwhelming and frustrating. When faced with the possibility that the world may not be as equal or as just as one thinks it to be, many students may become frustrated and look for ways to avoid thinking about such issues. If students feel as if they stand to lose a good deal of privilege (including the privilege of seeing the world as an equitable place), they may fall back on discourses that serve to distract their attention away from the issue of inequality. In my final chapter, I will revisit these concerns and discuss ways to help students—men in particular—work with these frustrations and find a sustainable interest in feminism.

Although Tucker often made statements that (consciously or unconsciously) served to protect his privilege as a white male, some of his comments within the discourse of strategy were critiques that feminists would likely agree with, including the

feelings of being overwhelmed discussed above. In another conversation, Tucker expressed concern that his classmates' explanations of inequality remained abstract in a way that possibly obscured agency and human action, reifying the concept of society:

> …we talked about how society is like this big, overbearing thing that has an effect on everybody. I think we sort of use [the word] society too much in general. It's not like—I mean, people talk about society it affecting a group of people, but that doesn't make any sense because those people fit into society as well. It's not like society is like this one all-inclusive thing and this is the way it thinks. There are certainly certain things that society does, but I guess to overgeneralize norms that you can say that's what society is—I think we use that too much in that class. It's just sorta not specific enough. It's sort of hard to draw any meaning when you're just using society over and over again, because what are you going to do? You can't pick out society and say those people *are* society.

Tucker's analysis of how other students reify the concept of society works in the discourse of strategy because he criticized the ways in which feminism was discussed in his class, especially when feminism was discussed in abstract and systemic ways. However, his comments also offer a perceptive critique of how language obscures reality and the ways in which power is used and reproduced (Schwalbe, 2004). If students attribute inequality to society, then people are hidden in the analysis, and it can be difficult to find practical solutions if human agency is not seen. If inequality is blamed upon reified concepts such as "society," students like Tucker may feel powerless to act towards change.

Edward also offered critical insights that could be helpful in understanding how strategy might be improved to better serve men. As noted above, Edward recognized that men often think and learn within the realm of the rational. In another conversation, he said that "thinking precipitates the emotional." Similar to Tucker, Edward thought that it was important to offer men practical applications for transforming feminist thought into action:

I think that once you begin to interact with the real-life sector, it just becomes more real, and it's not just something to talk about. I guess that makes it a more healthy experience because a lot of the stuff, I feel like many people feel powerless to change. And when you finally feel like you have some self determination, some impact on a person's life to make things better, then I think that certainly contributes to the emotional side. I'd say they compliment each other, the emotional, spiritual, and the action. And the action nurtures the emotional and it's sort of a positive feedback loop.

Edward recognized that many people—including men—are likely to "feel powerless to change" unless they can see some concrete results from their efforts. Just as facts and rational thinking may provide a buy-in for men to invest in feminism, so too, practical results may provide a basis for men to emotionally investment in feminism. For Edward, this emotional investment itself may be relatively empty if not transformed into some kind of action, whether it be internal (changing oneself) or external (working against sexist inequality), or both:

Obviously, tales of extreme violence are going to make it emotional for me. Obviously, that's going to get me worked up, but if they just sort of sit on that and don't do anything, then nobody's better for it.

As he alludes in the quotes above, Edward sees feminist education for men as involving many different kinds of learning: considering intellect, emotion, spirituality/introspection, and action are all important in providing a well-rounded education. In my final chapter, I will further discuss how feminist teachers might reflectively and reflexively incorporate these complementary elements into teaching feminism to men.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed how participants in my study drew upon a masculinist notion of objectivity in their critiques of feminism. Within the discourse of objectivity, participants portrayed feminism as being overly subjective or even biased in its view of gendered inequality. Within this discourse, men viewed empirical and

quantitative research as more scientific and objective, sometimes dismissing qualitative research as being less true or valid. Because the masculine is associated with objectivity, men were able to simultaneously criticize the subjective nature of feminist scholarship and women's thinking while relying on their own subjectivity, which aligned more with their notion of objective thinking. Subjectivity was also a problem within the discourse of objectivity because some participants were troubled by conflicting perspectives of a singular situation; by default, they fell back upon masculinist notions of objectivity and reinforced the status quo of gender relations.

As I mentioned above, the discourse of objectivity overlaps with the discourse of strategy in that many criticisms of feminism invoked both. In the discourse of strategy, participants shifted their focus from the content of feminism to the methods through which this content was delivered. Doing so kept their critical energy externally focused on strategy instead of directing it internally to explore their possible participation in a culture that enables and sustains gender inequality.

Although the men in my study all professed a desire to learn and understand feminism, their appeals to authority directed their thinking away from feminist thinking and more towards negative perceptions of feminism. As appeals to authority, both discourses work similarly to discourses within other appeals: they serve to distract men from examining their privileges. Although men may not be aware of this process, such distractions are a form of active resistance to learning feminism. In this chapter, I have alluded to ways that men might learn feminism through an acknowledgement of these discourses and a pedagogy that engages different types of learning for men. After discussing appeals to extremes in the following chapter, I will conclude with a more

detailed discussion of how feminist teachers might productively work with these

discourses.

APPEALS TO MODERATION

Appeals to moderation were moves in which participants positioned themselves as politically moderate or liberal in contrast to a feminism that they portrayed as radical or extreme. I found that my participants made appeals to moderation as they interacted with theories that challenged the privileges associated with their identities as men. These appeals were made when participants portrayed feminism as a radical set of beliefs that overstated gendered inequality and/or offered solutions that were too extreme to be practical. In portraying feminism as overly radical, participants sometimes unfavorably compared feminism to communism. Appeals to moderation were made within two discourses: the *discourse of liberalism* and the *discourse of capitalism*.

In framing feminism as a set of radical beliefs and practices, participants often appealed to descriptions of themselves as being open-minded. They offered their own open-mindedness and liberal beliefs as a moderate and more reasonable contrast to a feminism they saw as overstating gender inequality or offering drastic or unrealistic solutions. Participants often portrayed themselves as politically moderate or liberal; that is, open to feminism and advocating for equal rights and opportunities for women but unwilling to commit to any extreme position. Such positioning of themselves allowed them to shy away from challenges to their privilege. I call these moves to liberalism and moderation the *discourse of liberalism*.

Similarly, when participants appealed to liberal thought, they sometimes did so under an assumption that a capitalist society was both inevitable and practical. Within the *discourse of capitalism*, participants had difficulty imaging a society based on equality. They used capitalism as an explanation for why inequality would continue and for why feminist thought might be misguided or inadequate within American culture. Within the discourse of capitalism, participants set up feminism as a radical and impractical extreme, often comparing it to Marxism or communism as examples of equality gone too far.

"You gotta tone it down just a little bit": The Discourse of Liberalism

As a social and political philosophy, liberalism views individuals as the keys to social change if they are given freedom of choice and equality of opportunity. In other words, a liberal framework seeks means to broaden access to existing social institutions as they are currently constructed instead of changing those institutions or creating new ones. Additionally, liberalism hinges on the idea of "tolerating" variations from dominant norms but does not seek to significantly change these norms. In my interviews with participants, I found that they sometimes spoke about feminism in ways that drew upon a discourse of liberal beliefs or assumptions. Frequently, participants described themselves as open-minded in their approach to feminism. At times, participants disagreed with radical readings or perspectives and looked to a more liberal form of feminism as something they could agree with, describing themselves as moderate or liberal in their beliefs, but specifically *not* radical.[36]

In describing their political philosophies as they initially approached their women's studies courses, James, Tucker, and Toby all said that they considered

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[36] In an interesting parallel, Stewart presented himself as being more politically radical or "revolutionary" in his thinking; however, he was initially hesitant to label his views "feminist." I see this hesitance as another form of moderating feminism—equating it with other beliefs promoting equity while being hesitant to specifically name these beliefs as feminist.

themselves "liberal." Toby, however, used the term dismissively in describing his beliefs before learning feminism. In contrast, he considered his beliefs to be radical after learning feminism in introductory women's studies course. James and Tucker used the word "liberal" in a positive manner during interviews to describe their political beliefs both before and after learning feminism. Although Jimmy shied away from labeling himself as either "liberal" or "conservative" and frequently referred to his political beliefs as "moderate" or "middle-ground," I considered his appeals to open-mindedness to fit in with the framework of liberalism because they hinged on tolerating differences while adhering to the status quo.

Jimmy, Edward, and James best exemplified participants' appeals to liberal beliefs, specifically through appeals to open-mindedness. When asked about their initial attitudes toward taking a women's studies course, all three said they approached the course open-mindedly, as a positive learning opportunity. Their assumptions about what this learning opportunity entailed, however, seemed to fit in with a liberal approach to diversity: tolerating different ideas rather than taking them personally or seeing how they might contribute to real and significant social change. In their initial approaches to women's studies, all three assumed that they would learn more about what feminism meant as a theory, but they did not expect to change their own beliefs or behaviors in response.

Jimmy viewed himself as being "not too much of a political person," and he consistently described himself as being "moderate" or "middle-ground" in his politics and social philosophy. As a moderate, he considered himself willing to listen to ideas outside of his belief system without quick judgment, and taking a women's studies course was no exception:

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I try and tackle a course open minded. I can take anything that's thrown at me, and you know, it didn't really bother me too much because I look at feminism—I mean it's definitely not a bad thing, but I don't agree with everything, so I'm kinda middle-ground. So I signed up for the course and I thought maybe this could shed some light on it. But so far it hasn't 'cause it's more the radicalist feminists that I've read about and talked about and stuff. And you know that's not really me. I'm not radical on any one thought because it's, you know, it's just too hardcore. You gotta tone it down just a little bit. But you know, I'm for women having equality in the workplace and school and everything, uh, but I have my own opinions about, like, the draft.… I'm middle ground. And, you know, you can't learn anything by being scared of it and not trying to find out about the topic. So, you know, I don't necessarily know that much about feminism, but taking a course, I'm hoping I'll learn a lot, you know.

From the outset, Jimmy positioned himself as "middle-ground," not only politically speaking, but also specifically in relation to feminism. From the beginning of the course, he was already aware that "I don't agree with everything" about feminism, particularly in relation to "radical" positions, which were too "hardcore" for him. In distancing himself from what he saw as the radical elements of feminism, Jimmy positioned himself as moderate. He also positioned himself as liberal in the sense that he was willing to let other individuals hold opinions different from his own and he hoped to "learn a lot" from them, even if he assumed that their positions would not change his own.

As described in his quote above, Jimmy was initially put off by what he saw as the radical perspectives[37] offered at the beginning of his women's studies course. Jimmy instead favored readings that were less controversial. A few weeks into the course, he became quite enthusiastic about course readings on the "nature versus nurture" debate within feminism because he felt that this topic was one about which "no one can really get offended." In regards to the curriculum of his course, Jimmy was more comfortable with more moderate or liberal feminist perspectives. His comfort level with more liberal

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[37] In our interviews, Jimmy was specifically critical of the views presented by Marilyn Frye (1982) in the essay "Oppression" from her book *The Politics of Reality*.

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perspectives is not surprising given that liberal feminism is less likely to ask Jimmy to make any sacrifices in the name of gender equity. Additionally, such perspectives are less likely to cause conflicts in the classroom that might offend people who are in positionalities affected by oppression (or, alternatively, by privilege). In short, moderate and liberal perspectives within feminism are much safer for someone such as Jimmy, who stands to lose from understanding his privilege.

According to Jimmy, this comfort level shifted and was expanded to some degree as the semester progressed, although he did not think that his overall opinions or beliefs had changed to any significant degree. Even as he became more comfortable hearing radical perspectives, he continued to distance himself from what he saw as "extremists" within feminism:

> In regards to the class, I see that a lot of feminist views are good, but then there are the extremists. I'm not for that. A lot of those masculine traits, I think that men need to still hold those. But the extreme oppressive "let's overpower you kind of thing"—I guess I'm as some kind of middle ground just like I am in politics, and probably academics as well. I can see the good and the bad in both sides of the argument. But now taking this class, we've touched on men and women stuff, mostly women's side of the story, and I would say I'm leaning more towards—if feminist stuff was left, and masculine stuff was right, I'd be more left center on that topic. Some things haven't really changed my views, but they've brought my views out to the forefront. So I can see them a little a better.

For Jimmy, his women's studies course served as a form of values clarification, but only in the sense that it helped him to better understand and confirm the beliefs he already had, not to change them. As stated above, Jimmy was conscious of the fact that his perspective had not changed: "Some things haven't really changed my views, but they've brought my views out to the forefront."

In an interview near the end of the semester, Jimmy echoed this idea that he had learned new information from the course but he had not changed his overall opinions as a

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result. He still considered himself politically moderate and cautious in regards to

feminism, though he felt that he had more awareness about the issues after taking a

women's studies course:

> From an economic standpoint I'm more conservative. I save my money. But at the same token, I more liberal on gay rights, and I'm taking a women's studies course and going to a liberal university. Like abortion, I'm pretty liberal about that. I don't look at myself as conservative or liberal. It's more of a gradient. As far as politics go, I would say I'm still middle ground, maybe just apathetic. I really just don't care. But with women's studies, I would say that being more aware—even though my opinions haven't changed—the raised awareness has shifted me more towards being someone who wants to be more equal with their female counterpart. I wouldn't say that I've changed that much, but the raised awareness has forced me to think about it more and to try to be more equal. I think that's one of the goals of women's studies courses, to raise awareness and then leave it up to the student from there to be more equal or not.

Again in this example, Jimmy was clear that even if he better understood feminism and

was more aware after taking women's studies, his "opinions haven't changed." Although

his opinions stayed the same, Jimmy did suggest that his future actions might change

because of his newfound awareness of feminism. He said that "the raised awareness has

forced me to think about it more and to try to be more equal." Jimmy may not have

considered himself as a changed person in relation to learning feminism, but if his actions

actually do change, this would suggest that he has been affected by his women's studies

course to some degree.

Like Jimmy, Edward also positioned himself as moderate but open-minded in his

initial approach to feminism. Although Edward later changed his approach to women's

studies and considered himself to be supportive of a more radical version feminism, his

initial approach to the course was liberal in its focus on diversity and how the course

might make him a more aware and better person:

> It was just out there. People are taking [women's studies courses], and it's probably interesting, but, you know, I don't really know that much about it. For

me, I would equate it with AFAM [African-American studies]. I don't think a program like that would exist if it wasn't necessary.… I'd say my assumption going into the course was that I would come out more aware of what was going on. I didn't know—I really didn't expect—I don't know…. I knew that I would be presented with some ideas that were very different from what I thought. I didn't think that they would be so foreign to me that I wouldn't be able to practically apply them, at least in a sense. Or even start to understand them, to be able to engage in a dialogue with someone. I didn't ever think that I would just be like, "No, no, no, I don't want to talk about this."

Although Edward didn't think that he would be overtly resistant to the ideas of the course, he later described feeling "really challenged" by the course and acknowledged resistance when faced with his privilege. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Edward quickly recognized that his women's studies course was a challenge to his privilege as a non-disabled, heterosexual, upper-middle-class white male. Instead of succumbing to this resistance and reacting defensively, Edward decided to challenge himself and take the course personally, engaging in lengthy and ongoing introspection and eventually considering himself supportive of a more radical form of feminism.

While Edward often reflected on the personal changes he had experienced as a result of learning feminism, other participants stuck closer to their initial positions of liberal open-mindedness and tolerance as their women's studies classes progressed. James's initial approach to feminism was similar to Edward's, particularly in his comparison of women's studies to other forms of diversity:

I thought I'd learn more about what exactly feminism is, because I'm sure you've come across stereotypes of feminists, you know lesbian, short hair, hates men, duh duh duh. I was like I'd be interested to see—like I'm taking a Buddhism class right now because I wanted to see what it really entails. I thought that would be interesting to find out. I consider myself very open minded and very sympathetic to the women's cause, and I agree with a lot of what they are doing, you know, equal rights and equal pay. And I thought it would be interesting to take that.

Similar to Edward, James saw feminism as part of a liberal arts education, which included a diversity of perspectives on topics such as race, religion, and gender. James referred to himself as "open minded and sympathetic to the women's cause." His views of "the women's cause" were specifically liberal in their focus on "equal rights and equal pay" as the defining features of feminism.

In describing himself, James considered himself to be liberal and open-minded, and I felt that this was something he consciously considered important to his identity even before taking a women's studies course. In our first interview, James portrayed himself as liberal, wanting to speak out against stereotypes and willing to defend his beliefs to those who might disagree with him. James told me that he hoped his women's studies class would offer support to strengthen and justify his pre-existing beliefs about equality and gender stereotypes:

> I'm not one to agree with stereotypes in any—in relation to race, sex, in relation to any type of situation. I may have subconsciously agreed with some of them, but I didn't actively voice them or feel like I agreed with them, and would generally try to defend the position in an argument, like, well that's wrong, you know? And some of my friends here still—I don't know—they're just skeptical to it, or whatever. I definitely know about the stereotypes. That's why I took the class, because I figured I wouldn't be subject to those [in the class] and it would be interesting to be able to defend [against stereotypes] with stuff I learned.

These comments suggest James did not assume that he would actually change his perspective after taking a women's studies course, but rather that he would be better equipped to defend the liberal perspective that he already held.

Later, when I asked him about what he saw as the benefits of taking a women's studies course, James said that "I have more knowledge on it and can argue better." In this sense, taking a women's studies class provided support and justification for James's

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identity as a liberal, working to confirm his beliefs and offer him more evidence in

conversations and arguments with those who might challenge him:

> Learning about the movement I guess is good, and learning more about the history of abortion. That's one thing that I want: to be better at arguing for it. That's one thing that I have to really, really do, because I really don't want someone to say something and I'll be like, huh? *Why* do I think this? *Why* do I feel this way? This is why, motherfucker.

James referred to the issue of abortion specifically as something that he wanted to be able

to argue more effectively for. Similarly, Jimmy claimed that his overall political views

didn't significantly change, but he felt better equipped to defend his beliefs after taking

the class:

> Like if you asked me a question about gay rights or abortion or something before the class, I'd have the same opinion, but I wouldn't have anything to back it up. No evidence, no strong argument for it. And I wouldn't have my opinion set in stone because of that. So if someone came up to me and had a good argument about abortion before I took this class, I could be swayed one way or the other. But now I took my initial feelings and have applied it to this class and have actually gained more knowledge because of that.

I found it to be an interesting paradox that both Jimmy and James thought a primary

benefit in learning feminism was that they felt even more justified in their beliefs—in

other words, more objectively correct. While both of their opinions support a masculinist

notion of objectivity, James's comments are particularly masculinist because of his

specific desire to win arguments by being better informed than his opponent ("This is

why, motherfucker"). For James, the information he learned in his women's studies

course was beneficial to him primarily because it helped to make him right when arguing

with those more conservative than himself. As I discussed in earlier chapters, James saw

himself as an ally to feminists, a good guy. Thus, because he did not perceive himself as

needing to greatly improve his position on gender equity, he was not often introspective about his experience learning feminism.

Although his women's studies course was able to offer him justification for his beliefs and provide material to strengthen his arguments, James was sometimes frustrated by his women's studies course. At times, James expressed concern that the course was too radical for him, as in the case of abortion. As a self-proclaimed liberal, James was supportive of abortion, but only under the terms he had established before taking the course:

> Abortion was sort of—I disagreed with them on—we had the same opinion on it, but for different reasons maybe. For abortion, one of the things is they'd hold up a blank sheet of paper, a blank tablet, you know, with abortion legislation, and I didn't completely agree with like no holds barred abortion. So I disagreed with the feminist point on that. Stuff like that, but I still was pro-choice.

In this example, James distanced himself from feminism by saying that he "didn't completely agree" with feminists about the specifics of legislation and women's access to abortion. Yet, he still is careful to point out that in spite of this disagreement, he did not betray his identity as a liberal ("I was still pro-choice.").

When I asked James to help me understand the points on which he agreed with feminist thinking, he pointed to political issues primarily and social issues as a secondary concern. His general focus was on "equal rights" for women. As noted before, the point at which James felt that he disagreed with feminism was when they targeted men as being responsible for women's subordinate status in gender relations:

> Yeah, [I agree with feminist on] mostly the political stuff. Well, probably the social stuff, too. Like I definitely agree with equal rights, and I agree with that for everybody, not just women. Equal pay, again everybody, not just women. I agree that abortion should be legal. I have some qualms with no holds barred abortion, but whatever. And total equality. Equality all around just encompasses all that. And socially, I believe, you know, I don't believe in the cult of domesticity. I

agree with equality in the household and equal pay and all that. Probably the areas I disagree with them is like—I don't know about modern feminists, but the feminists we read in class—would be how they attributed it. Like them attributing rape and sexual assault and stuff like that [to men]. I guess where I disagree with them is where they go against me.

Here again, James positioned himself as liberal, agreeing with feminists in advocating for equal rights and abortion, but focusing specifically on individual rights. I thought that James stopped short from being more radical in his thinking because he distanced himself from other (oppressive) men and feared challenges to his own male privilege and power ("I guess where I disagree with them is where they go against me."). In the context of our conversations, James also said that he thought the women in his class often portrayed men as too intentionally and collectively working to oppress women, a point with which some feminists and sociologists would likely agree (Johnson, 1997, 2006; Kleinman, Copp, & Sandstrum, 2006; Schwalbe, 2004). Because he considered himself as being good to the women in his life and generally supportive of liberal feminism, he didn't want to be associated with other men who he thought *were* hurting women. Thus, he felt that when feminists spoke out against men, he unjustly caught flak in the crossfire. This sacrifice was not one that James was willing to make in the name of equality.[38]

"To me, that was Karl Marx up one side and down the other": The Discourse of Capitalism

In their attempts to understand feminism, I found that some participants drew upon a discourse of capitalism that sometimes interfered with their ability to comprehend the possibility of an equitable world. Two facets of this discourse worked to prevent participants from being receptive to feminism. First, participants spoke of capitalism as

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[38] In this sense, we can see how the example also works as an appeal to self: not only is his primary focus on himself, but he also works within the discourse of taking offense by expressing concern about how feminists portray men.

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something both inevitable and desirable, assuming that it would exist in any future that they could conceive.[39] Because capitalism relies on a hierarchy of classes in order to maintain a pool of cheap labor, this assumption interfered with participants' ability to conceive an equitable society. Second, and based on the previous assumption, participants sometimes specifically compared feminist equity to Marxism or communism, assuming that a society based upon these philosophies was neither practical nor desirable.

In the first facet of the discourse of capitalism, participants spoke of a capitalist society as if it were the only practical economic system of which they could conceive. More than the other participants, Jimmy spoke and thought within the discourse of capitalism during our interviews, assuming capitalism to be a given in the context of the United States. Jimmy's characterization of capitalism as unavoidable shows how the discourse of capitalism often worked in conjunction with the discourse of inevitability. At times, Jimmy referenced capitalism as something that couldn't be avoided, and it seemed to me that this perceived inevitability precluded any criticism of capitalist systems. As an analogy, speaking against capitalism would be like criticizing the color of the sky: what would be the point of doing so if one was powerless to change it?

In a conversation about advertising and the wedding industry, Jimmy made comments that revealed his assumptions about capitalism. He referred to a course reading that was critical of how extravagant weddings have been marketed to children, specifically through Disney films and advertising. While he seemed to think this kind of marketing was wrong to some degree, he also called it "capitalism at its finest." When I asked him to elaborate on this comment, he said:

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[39] Although I say that participants saw capitalism as "desirable," many of them were not wholly uncritical of capitalism; rather, they saw it as the best possible (if possibly flawed) system of economics and government. Even if it was not perfect in their eyes, it remained the only practical option.

Like the old ads for Camel cigarettes had Joe Camel, and it was a cartoon character. Whether they did it by mistake or on purpose, they were marketing to kids, and so you market to kids and they get the idea that smoking is fun and cool, and then they smoke when they get older. It's the same sort of thing with marriage. It's marketed probably not on purpose by Disney, but it's marketed to kids—that big, extravagant weddings, fairytale weddings are good. And through magazines and as they got older, seeing celebrities get married, that's what they want. That sort of media influence definitely cranked up the cost of weddings and that sort of thing—the good marketing, advertising in every source of media— that's just capitalism.

Despite being critical of advertising to children, Jimmy concluded that such practices were inevitable within our economic system. He was also hesitant to attribute volition to corporations such as Disney ("It's marketed probably not on purpose") while at the same time recognizing that "they were marketing to kids" and "that sort of media influence definitely cranked up the cost of weddings." Thus, while such advertising has a negative effect on children and consumers, there seems to be nothing that we can do about it. Although we may not like it, "that's just capitalism."

Later in that conversation, Jimmy spoke more specifically about what he saw as the inevitability of capitalism's effects. In doing so, he relied on a framework of liberalism to explain his perspective:

Well, you can't really avoid [advertising to kids], because it's all in the media. I guess with marriage, and there will be an indirect advertisement, so I don't know how you would prevent that. I think when you're young, you can develop so much of your ideals, so much of your ideas on things that when you grow up, it's hard to change. So if you're influenced later, when you can already have your own opinion on certain things, then that would be better, but how are you going to block television and magazines from kids? Hopefully, the youth of today will not be ignorant and narrow-minded to think just along with what media is feeding them or telling them. They can extrapolate and think on their own. The masses tell you that's not true, but hopefully, with the individual, it's better off, they think on their own.

Jimmy used "the media" as an explanation that reified capitalist advertising as something that "you can't really avoid." Although he might have been critical of such practices, he

viewed them as something beyond his control ("I don't know how you would prevent that;" "it's hard to change"). Because he saw no solution for changing larger structures of power or influence, his answer was to turn to the individual—a key move in liberal thought: "…hopefully, with the individual, it's better off, they think on their own." For Jimmy—and for liberal thought, generally speaking—social change relies on the ability of individuals to be critical and take action for themselves. Such an approach also takes current social dynamics as given, therefore precluding any broader analysis or possible reform of social structures.

Because he assumed capitalism to be a given, Jimmy also reinforced the second facet of the discourse of capitalism by referring specifically to Marxism as an undesirable extreme that contrasted the current capitalist status quo. In our first conversation, he had trouble comprehending the possibility of a society based on equality of all people. In working through his thoughts, he was explicitly critical of Marxism as something that he wouldn't want in a society:

> Because if we're all equal, and nothing's different, it's all the same, that's kind of a Marxist society, you know? There's no differences and, uh, I don't know. It doesn't set right. I understand that there needs to be equality in most places, but then again, you know, I don't know…

On one hand, Jimmy seems fearful of a perceived bland sameness that would be the result of such a society where "nothing's different." But beyond this assumption, such equality was also disconcerting to Jimmy because of his status within the current capitalist system. Because he embodies a positionality where privileges are given to him—specifically because he is an able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, white male—it makes sense that the idea of equality for all "doesn't set right." As someone who is given advantages because of his positionality in many ways, it stands to reason that Jimmy would fear

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losing some of these privileges in an equal society. His comments echo Tucker's quote

from the discourse of inevitability:

> I mean, we don't live in an equal society, and we never will, I don't think. I mean unless we want to be communists. That would be equal to some degree. People are always going to be rich and people are always going to be poor.

For both Jimmy and Tucker, the idea of an equal society was uncomfortable, not in small

part because it seemed Marxist to them both and would therefore serve to take away from

their privilege in order to equalize society.

Later in the semester, Jimmy was specifically critical of what he saw as Marxist

elements of feminism. When I asked him to tell me what he liked and disliked in his

women's studies course, Jimmy again positioned himself as being politically moderate,

criticizing what he saw as the "radical feminist movements" that his class learned about,

comparing them to Marxists in an unfavorable manner. Jimmy is worth quoting at length

on this topic:

> I would agree, you know, with the majority of the articles. There are some of them that I don't agree with, but I can't think of them off the top of my head. It would probably be the radical feminist movements. To me, that was Karl Marx up one side and down the other. Just reading it, the radical feminists calling for a complete change of economical, social, and every change of life—government as well. If you took out the whole patriarchal hierarchy out of government and economics and the social, you would be in a Marxist society. Everyone's equal, everything's equal. It looks good on paper, but it's not going to work. So I mean, in reading that, I was like, well, I think that socially, we should all be equal, but economically, capitalism works. It's been proven for at least however long this country has been around. I think that democracy has its flaws with its patriarchal hierarchy, but there's also checks and balances, so it's not just one person as head of state.… I can't pinpoint an example from the articles, but reading it, it just sounded like Marxism to me because I read *The Communist Manifesto* and all that jive, and it just—I don't know—I can't think of an exact example. I know it called for a non-patriarchal society, so no hierarchy. In every sector of life so like government and economics would fall under that, as well as social. I think socially it would work, but how do you separate social and economic and government? That would be pretty difficult.

As this quote illustrates, Jimmy was fearful of radical feminism because he did not see equality as a practical or desirable goal. Although he saw equality as a pleasant ideal, it wasn't something that he thought could be reached: "It looks good on paper, but it's not going to work." In thinking through his beliefs about equality, Jimmy made a distinction between the social and the economic in saying that "socially, we should all be equal, but economically, capitalism works." In this logic, the social and the economic are mutually exclusive; what Jimmy ignored in this comment are the ways in which economics shape social equality and vice versa, a fact on which both capitalist economists and Marxists would agree. Jimmy, too, agreed at the end of his statements by acknowledging that it "would be pretty difficult" to separate the social and the economic realms of society. Thus, if indeed "capitalism works," the only conclusion that Jimmy could draw is that we will always also have inequality as an inevitable side effect. If this is the case, then Jimmy can only view Marxism and radical feminism as misguided in calling for an equal society.

Conclusions

Within the appeals to moderation described in this chapter, participants framed feminism as too extreme or impractical in its beliefs and strategic goals. Participants instead relied on more dominant discourses of liberalism and capitalism to position themselves as moderate and to critique feminism. In the discourse of liberalism, participants positioned themselves as politically liberal or moderate, contrasting their beliefs with a version of feminism they described as too extreme or impractical in its beliefs or strategic goals.

Similarly, in the discourse of capitalism, participants assumed the inevitability of capitalism as the best possible economic system. In fact, capitalism was so deeply assumed by some participants that they were unable to conceive of any other system that would realistically work. Participants explicitly compared the equality advocated by feminism with communism, a social and economic philosophy they saw as unrealistic and undesirable. Because they equated true equality and feminism with communism, they concluded that true equality was not a practical goal for feminists to advocate in the context of the United States.

Because participants portrayed feminism as impractical in these ways, we can see how these discourses overlap as appeals to authority as well: in speaking of feminism as a radical and impractical set of beliefs, participants positioned themselves on the side of reason and rationality, a distinctive feature of the discourse of objectivity. Additionally, because the discourses of liberalism and capitalism both criticized the goals of feminism as being unrealistic or unattainable, we can see how they also overlap with the discourse of strategy.

REFLECTIVE STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS NAME AND UNDERSTAND MEN'S RESISTANCE TO FEMINISM

In part because of my own investment in feminism as a former women's studies student and as a feminist teacher who has taught feminism in women's studies and education classrooms, this study began as an attempt to understand the different ways in which men engage with feminism in women's studies classes. In conducting this study, I assumed that men would self-select and that my participants would likely be polarized: divided between pro-feminist men who would reflect on their struggles to live their ideals and anti-feminist men who were looking for an opportunity to vent. What was striking to me as I conducted interviews was that some participants did not easily fit into either category. Jimmy and Tucker, for example, expressed some degree of overt resistance to feminism at the beginning of the semester, but later considered themselves to be more sympathetic to feminism. Even immediately after self-describing as feminist in our final interview, Tucker spoke within the discourse of strategy and began to criticize feminist women for not providing concrete strategies to end gendered oppression.

Similarly, James considered himself to be quite aligned with feminism as part of his identity as a political liberal. Additionally, he seemed comfortable with presenting himself within a masculinity that was more modern and flexible than traditionally masculine. However, despite this stated philosophical agreement with feminism, James surprised me by spending much of his time in our interviews expressing frustration and criticism of his women's studies course, and he ultimately would not call himself a

feminist because he thought he was "too lazy" to be considered one. In short, I noticed that participants' relationships to feminism were more complex than I expected, and these three participants in particular—Jimmy, Tucker, and James—saw themselves as generally sympathetic to feminism while simultaneously expressing various forms of resistance to feminist pedagogy and feminist thought. As I analyzed my data, I began to focus on my participant's resistance and the ways in which it served to preserve their privileges, in particular their privilege as men. In doing so, I hoped to help feminist teachers both understand and consider strategies for engaging with men's resistance to feminism within the context of women's studies courses.

In order to show how men preserve and actively[40] enact male privilege, I concentrated on the discourses through which my participants enacted resistance to feminism. To better understand the relationships among these discourses, I categorized them within four kinds of appeals made by participants: appeals to self; appeals to progress; appeals to authority; and appeals to moderation. When participants made appeals to self, they prioritized their own feelings and intentions above all else, sometimes claiming to take offense at feminist ideas or portraying themselves as victims of feminist reforms. In appeals to progress, participants cited the successes of feminism, equated their own experiences as men with feminist portrayals of women's oppression, and spoke of sexist inequality as natural or inevitable. When participants made appeals to authority, they drew upon a masculine notion of objectivity, assuming the authority to criticize feminism as being overly subjective and misguided in its strategies for working towards an equitable society. Finally, in appeals to moderation, participants positioned themselves as politically moderate or liberal in contrast to a feminism they saw as too

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[40] I argue that although men's resistance to feminism may sometimes be unconscious, it is always active.

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radical or extreme, often comparing it to communism and drawing upon capitalist ideas and assumptions in making their argument.

As noted within the previous chapters, these appeals often overlapped and served to reinforce one another. For example, the discourses of capitalism, strategy, and inevitability all portrayed inequality as an unavoidable—and ultimately desirable, if flawed—feature of human nature; in doing so, they all argued against feminist theory that called for a world without domination and oppression. The existence of such a world, of course, would mean that participants would lose the undeserved male privilege afforded to them in the current gender system. As another example of interconnections between appeals, both appeals to self and appeals to authority prioritized men's feelings and perspectives (seen as objective) over the perspectives offered by women in their course readings, lectures, or discussions.

In a sense, the distinctions I have created to separate appeals and to distinguish discourses within these appeals are artificial because all of the discourses were unified in working together to preserve participants' male privilege when confronted with the challenges of feminist thought. Sometimes, this preservation was more unconscious and indirect—for example, Jimmy's constant focus on his intentionality rather than the consequences of his actions. At other times, the resistance to feminism was more conscious—as in the discourse of moderation, when James acknowledged that "where I disagree with them is where they go against me." Conscious or unconscious—intentional or unintentional—all discourses of resistance served the same purpose: to actively preserve male privilege.

Significantly, all of the discourses of resistance also served to protect the other forms of privileges held by participants who used them.[41] At the risk of reducing participants to their positionalities of privilege, it is notable that the three men who were most resistant to feminism in my study were all able-bodied, heterosexually-identified, middle-class white men. In other words, these men had more than one form of privilege from which they benefited. Of the four men who identified themselves more readily as feminists and showed a smaller degree of resistance in our interviews, two of them identified as being personally affected by at least one form of oppression: Toby was readily aware of his middle-class, white, male privilege but also identified as bisexual; Julius, who identified as a gay black man, grew up in poverty and often witnessed the physical and emotional abuse of his mother at the hands of multiple men. Julius himself was also a survivor of sexual assault at the hands of one of his mother's boyfriends.

Yet, three of the men who identified themselves as feminists and cited a positive relationship with feminism—Edward, Kevin, and Stewart—identified as able-bodied, heterosexual white men who grew up in households that did not experience poverty.[42] In other words, some participants who considered themselves to be feminist men were also individuals who benefited from more than one kind of privilege. From this fact, we can conclude that although privilege may have a significant effect on an individual's response

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[41] However, I would argue that because the discourses are dominant and hegemonic, even those who do not have privileges may still employ them, reifying and reinforcing the privileges of others. As Hytten and Warren (2003) found in their study of how whiteness gets reified in classrooms that teach racial diversity, " 'strategies'—those citations of power that are thought to be levied by those in power—were not so clearly situated in those in power" (p. 67). Similar to whiteness, I argue that male privilege is a "discourse of power" that can be exercised by anyone, "not just those who occup[y] positions of cultural power" (p. 63). I argue that those who do occupy such positions of cultural power, however, are more likely to employ male privilege through discourse.

[42] Edward explicitly self-identified as upper-middle class. Although we did not have explicit conversations about class, I gathered that both Kevin and Stewart either grew up working class or lower-middle class. Neither stated that they had experienced poverty, and their social class did not play an explicit role in their narratives of themselves.

to feminism—a set of beliefs that can be seen as a direct challenge to this privilege—privilege does not wholly determine or define that response. Further, we can see that there are possibilities for men who are conferred privilege to positively participate in and contribute to theories such as feminism that may challenge the very privileges afforded to them.

If we consider resistance as an assertion of individuals' agency (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2001; Willis, 1977), we can reconsider men's resistance to feminism as an indication of their active engagement with the course material presented in women's studies classes. However frustrating it may be to a feminist teacher, the fact that men actively express their resistance suggests that it has the potential to be more productive than the alternative of total disengagement with women's studies courses and feminism in general. Titus (2000) asserts that feminist teachers can learn from student resistance and the "alternatives it suggests for crafting new classrooms cultures" (p. 24). In hopes of contributing to the creation of reflective and reflexive classroom cultures, I suggest that the first step in helping male students to learn from their resistance to feminism is to help them become aware of it. In my study, both Edward and Kevin offered narratives that spoke of their resistance as moving from an unconscious to consciousness state as they learned and came to adopt feminism as something personal and important to them. Thus, I recommend that teachers and students approach feminism in a manner that encourages men to become more actively and personally invested in feminism. In order for this to happen, teachers may need to name and help students consciously engage with the discourses of resistance discussed in this study.

If we assume that resistance is a form of engagement and active dialogue is an important feature of a pedagogical experience (Freire, 2000), how can teachers offer men spaces in which they can openly and productively express their resistance to feminism? As Titus (2000) suggests in her study of student resistance to feminist theory in education, many students are resistant when they feel as if a teacher is pushing an agenda in their classrooms: "Students might resist the ideological pressure they feel to adopt a feminist perspective. Female students may resist if they feel characterized as victims" (p. 24). To this, I would add the notion that male students may resist feminism if they feel characterized as perpetrators of, rather than allies against, sexism or oppression. As I have shown in Chapters Three through Six, particularly in appeals to self, much of men's resistance to feminism stems from their personal investment in their identities as men and their desire to see themselves—and for others to see them—as good people. The desire to see oneself and to be seen by others as an ally and a good person was a defining feature of the discourse of guilt and the discourse of taking offense.

Thus, as Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrom (2006) suggest in their article about how teachers can work with student resistance to feminism: "Students' resistance to course material comes partly from their perception that we, their feminist teachers, intimate that they are bad or insensitive people" (p. 132). While this statement is true for all students, men hold a unique position in this dynamic of wanting to be seen as good. They may feel that not only feminist teachers, but also course readings and the female students in their women's studies class all work together to imply that they *as men* are "bad or insensitive people." Additionally, if men are able to recognize that some of their beliefs or behaviors are sexist, they may react defensively rather than initiating the more

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difficult work of negotiating their privilege and changing their own behavior. As Edward

stated within the discourse of intentionality in Chapter Three:

> People come in to [women's studies classes] with a defense mechanism in place. Like "I'm a good person. I don't need to learn that. I have a girlfriend, I treat her right. Everybody says I do."

As Edward suggests, many defense mechanisms are enacted specifically in order for men

to retain their self-perception as being a "good person" in the face of challenges to that

self image.

One defensive reaction that men may have when learning feminism is to make a

personal distinction between themselves and the men whom they see as sexist or

oppressive. Yet even if men make such a distinction between themselves and truly sexist

men, they may still feel anxiety that women in their women's studies class unfairly

categorize them alongside these oppressive men. For example, some of the men in my

study were afraid to ask questions or speak in their women's studies classes for fear of

being seen as defending or participating in sexist behavior.[43] Additionally, in the sexually

charged and hetero-normative environments of most college campuses, men may feel

even more self-conscious and concerned about how others perceive them within

predominantly female women's studies classrooms. Thus, while men may think and

speak within the discourse of victimhood to protect their privileges and avoid dealing

with the implications of feminism, even those men who want to become feminist allies

may feel frustrated if they feel that feminism implicates them as "bad people" either

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[43] Because they are often socialized to satisfy men's emotional needs, women in women's studies may also participate in a similar phenomenon of being afraid to say something that might offend or upset men. Kathleen Turkel (1986) observed that female students searched for ways to create parallels between men's experiences and their own (e.g., "but don't women rape men?" (p. 198)) because they worried that talking about gender inequality would hurt men's feelings. Melanie Moore's students "dismiss[ed] the results of research, a theory, or any idea [if] it can be interpreted as derogatory toward men" (1997, p. 128).

because of their actions or because of their identification as men. As seen in previous chapters, this seemed to be the case with James's critiques of his women's studies class. Because of this fear of being seen as a bad person, many men may actually begin to disengage from course materials and class discussions. As Tucker reiterated in many of his interviews, "I mean, you say one thing that isn't the most PC thing in the world, and they just jump on it." In response to this concern, Tucker said, "I just keep quiet."

From the preceding paragraphs, two important questions emerge: How can feminist teachers help men feel positioned as allies rather than perpetrators in women's studies courses while still encouraging them to understand and challenge their privileges, particularly as men within a patriarchal culture? How can feminist teachers help men develop and maintain both personal and larger social investments in feminism? I suggest that feminist teachers can explicitly incorporate certain strategies for engaging student resistance. Helping students learn particular strategies for understanding feminism can help them take ownership in the material they learn and give them tools for engaging with new material (Kleinman et al., 2006). Thus, I suggest that feminist teachers include the following strategies into their pedagogies and curricula and openly discuss them with students: (1) critiquing individualistic liberal thought and teaching a systemic view of gender inequality; (2) teaching students about common forms of resistance to feminism and providing outlets for reflection and self-criticism; (3) teaching a poststructuralist feminist critique of objectivity; and (4) helping men to see their stake in feminist theory. In the following sections, I will discuss these strategies for teaching feminism to men and connect them to the discourses of resistance exhibited by participants in Chapters Three through Six.

Teaching A Systemic View of Gender Inequality

The first way feminist teachers can help position men as allies in feminism is to help students to see beyond individualistic portrayals of men and women and to alternatively understand gender inequality systemically. A central tenet of feminist theory is the conception of gender as an organizing feature of our lives and a key factor shaping our society and contributing to inequality within it. Feminism teaches that the separation of individuals into separate genders is not a neutral move of separate but equal. Rather, what is masculine is normative and objective (de Beauvoir, 1952), and men have been historically advantaged by this arrangement while women have been and continue to be systematically marginalized, exploited, and oppressed (Kenway & Modra, 1992). While these concepts are foundational to feminism and women's studies, a liberal explanation of this inequality focuses on the role of individuals in producing this inequality rather than examining how individuals both create and are affected by the systemic nature of oppression. The liberal focus on the role of individuals establishes a dynamic that can lead to an unproductive blame game within women's studies classrooms that may encourage men to feel guilty and defensive in their reaction to feminism (Johnson, 2006; Markowitz, 2005; Titus, 2000).

Allan Johnson's book *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (2006) offers a helpful explanation of the unproductive effects of liberal or individualistic thinking in analyses of gender inequality:

> If we use individualism to explain sexism, it's hard to avoid the idea that sexism exists simply because men *are* sexist—men have sexist feelings, beliefs, needs, and motivations that lead them to behave in sexist ways. If sexism produces evil consequences, it's because men *are* evil, hostile, and malevolent toward

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women.… Individualistic thinking … sets up men to feel personally attacked if anyone mentions gender issues and to define those issues as a "woman's problem." It also encourages men who don't think or behave in overtly sexist ways—the ones most likely to become part of the solution—to conclude that sexism has nothing to do with them, that it's just a problem for "bad" men. If well-intentioned men don't include themselves in the problem, they are unlikely to feel compelled to include themselves in the solution. (p. 77)

Nel Noddings (1989) more succinctly makes the same point in *Women and Evil* when she says "the structures of [male] dominance pervade our entire society, and they do not depend on the active malevolence of individual men" (p. 234).

Working from a similar critique of individualism, Kleinman and colleagues (2006) suggest that feminist teachers can help "students to see themselves neither as completely independent nor dependent, but rather as interdependent" (p. 137). These critiques of individualistic thinking might help men work through the "defense mechanisms" referenced by Edward as well as through the forms of resistance expressed by James, Tucker, and Jimmy in the preceding chapters. For example, Jimmy might be better able to reconcile his paradoxical feelings of guilt in reaction to course readings and the assumption that his privilege was inevitable:

The early readings about oppression and white privilege and male privilege, those just made me feel guilty. It was something I was born into, can't really change. What are you going to do?

If Jimmy examined the interrelationship between individuals and systems of privilege, he might understand that although much of his privilege is something conferred to him— something he neither deserved nor necessarily wanted—he might move beyond guilt to focus on how his actions either reinforce or work to diminish this undeserved privilege.

I suggest that teachers can best work against individualistic thinking not only by offering a systemic view of gender inequality, but also by helping students understand the

common ways in which it is often employed: in popular media, in their conversations with others, and specifically within discourses used in the classroom. In my personal experience teaching feminism, I have found that students respond well to Johnson's (2006) description of individuals and the systems within which they live and help create. Such an understanding of the pitfalls of individualistic thinking not only lowers student defensiveness, but it also enables students to take a broader sociological view of privilege and oppression (Pleasants & Ezzell, 2007, in press). Teaching students this critique of individualism also offers them a tool they can claim as their own and apply to other course readings when learning about the similarities among different forms of oppression.

Not only can feminist teachers help students recognize common patterns of individualist thinking, but they can offer an alternative theoretical framework. A helpful framework for feminist teachers teaching men is to help them understand that sexism and patriarchy are large social systems within which everyone—male and female alike—operates. Within these and other social systems of inequality, individuals' positionalities determine the amount of privilege afforded to them and the kinds—and to a large degree, the amount—of oppression that individual will experience within that system. Individuals' positionalities do not, however, determine how individuals use and perform the privilege they are given. If men learn that "sexism is not a product of a male conspiracy; rather, sexist practices continue simply by women and men doing business as usual" (Kleinman et al., 2006, p. 133), then they may be less likely to feel personally blamed and to concern themselves with how women in their classes perceive them.

Similarly, feminist teachers can lower student resistance to feminism by teaching students that there is often a disconnect between one's intentions and the consequences of

one's action (Kleinman et al., 2006; Schwalbe, 2004). Such a distinction may be most helpful for students if taught at an early stage of their women's studies course. As we saw in Chapter Three in the discourse of intentionality, men in women's studies classrooms often become frustrated because they feel misunderstood. Misunderstandings often occur because there is an opposition between what men feel or intend and the ways in which their actions affect those around them. Combined with a systemic view of privilege and oppression and an understanding of interdependency, this distinction between intentions and consequences can help men—and women as well—understand and reduce their defensive reactions to feminism.

For men in particular, this distinction can help them to overcome some of resistance we saw as appeals to self in Chapter Three. If feminist teachers are careful not to portray men as a group of individuals working together to intentionally enact and reinforce their domination over women, fewer male students will make appeals to self to protect their masculine identities and their accompanying male privilege. In particular, men may make fewer appeals to self because they will be less likely to feel unproductively and defensively guilty or offended if they don't feel that they, as men, are being unfairly portrayed as perpetrators in their women's studies classes. Further, if students reflexively understand the distinction between intentions and consequences, they can use this distinction as a conscious resource when thinking about gender inequality and other forms of oppression. As Kleinman and colleagues found in their study of working with student resistance to feminism, "the language of intentions vs. consequences gives students a tool for developing an analytical distance on their feelings of guilt" (p. 133).

Although teaching privilege and oppression as systems can be helpful in working against men's resistance, the danger in doing so is that it may provide students with readymade excuses for their sexist or racist behaviors, a phenomenon similar to what we saw with Jimmy's alleviated feelings of guilt in the discourse of inevitability described in Chapter Four:

> [These readings made me feel] a little more justified like my actions in life. There sociological evidence that how I act is not just my personality.… After reading this, it's like, okay, it's not my fault necessarily…

If feminist teachers focus too much on systems of privilege and oppression without also encouraging students to see their individual roles within these systems, there is the possibility that students such as Jimmy might rely on theories of socialization as a justification for sexist or oppressive behavior. If students feel that socialization is so overwhelming that they cannot help but reproduce such patterns of inequality, they are not likely to feel empowered to make change or participate in feminist movement. More specifically, they may feel that making personal change is futile if it does nothing to affect larger systems of inequality. Thus, they may lapse into the discourse of inevitability, assuming that progress is finite and that changing gender inequality is impossible. In the following section, I will address student reflection and an explicit engagement with discourses of resistance as strategies through which male-identified students may better understand their collective and individual relationships to systems of privilege and the ways in which they can act to change these systems.

Naming and Engaging Student Resistance through Reflection

Teaching students the systemic view of sexism within patriarchy described above can help students move beyond guilt to see that most sexist behavior is not based on

individuals' conscious and deliberate intentions, but is instead the result of "ritual [that is] patterned, automatic, and unreflective" (Kleinman et al., 2006, p. 133). Based on this understanding, feminist teachers can help students realize that their resistance to feminism is similarly "automatic and unreflective." Such resistance may also be found in students' reactions to learning about whiteness and white privilege. Hytten and Warren (2003) describe discourses that reify whiteness as being "already available, already common forms of asserting cultural dominance" (p. 66) for students learning diversity. Resistance is also a common reaction for students learning feminism because, similar to white privilege, masculinity and male privilege maintain themselves through hegemony, making resistance a normal reaction to any challenges to their cultural dominance.

Thus, my second suggestion for helping men learn feminism is that teachers help students to reflectively and reflexively engage with discourses of resistance that enact and reproduce privilege. Reflective engagement with resistance can involve small group discussions and, importantly, regular and reflective student writing that allows students to actively name and work with their resistance to feminism. In suggesting that students reflexively engage resistance, I am suggesting that students self-consciously read and discuss texts that describe common forms of resistance to feminism. In short, I am suggesting that the discourses discussed in Chapters Three through Six can serve as teaching tools to help students, particularly men, recognize and engage with their own resistance to feminism.[44] As Hytten and Warren (2003) suggest, discourses that reify and

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[44] Readings that might also serve as useful texts in helping students understand resistance to feminism include Johnson's chapter "What It All Has to Do with Us" from *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (2006); Kleinman, Copp, and Sandstrum's "Making Sexism Visible: Birdcages, Martians, and Pregnant Men" (2006); Markowitz's "Umasking Moral Dichotomies: Can Feminist Pedagogy Overcome Student Resistance?" (2005); Pleasants and Ezzell's "Thinking Beyond Achievement: Teaching Gender Through a Radical Feminist Framework" (2007); Titus's "Engaging Student Resistance to Feminism: 'How is This

reproduce privilege can be used "as a site of critique" for students learning about oppression (p. 87). Reading and understanding how people reassert their privilege can equip students with strategies to identify when they or other students are calling upon these discourses of resistance in their reaction to feminist material. A self-reflexive understanding of the students' reactions to feminism is supported by Joycechild (1987):

> We feel helping students name this process that many of them undergo, this alteration of consciousness, early on in the course in an on-going way, enhances their experiences of the course.… [I]t seems helpful to let students know that they're not the only ones, or the first ones, to undergo a psychological upheaval (to whatever degree) as a result of participating in the course, and that their range of reactions—excitement, empowerment, feeling they've been duped/ignorant because they never had this knowledge before, resistance, disbelief, frustration, anger, burn-out, wanting to act but wondering how, feeling as though their worlds have been shaken up, getting hostile reactions from family and significant others—is "normal." (cited in Lather, 1991, p. 128)

As Joycechild suggests, helping normalize these discourses of resistance will help students better prepare for the array of difficult reactions they may feel in response to learning feminism.

Encouraging students to engage in reflection can give them the space to more freely express their resistance and frustrations with feminist theory and pedagogy, thus helping to avoid their disengagement with course material. Reflective writing, in particular, may be a safe medium through which male students can express their resistance. On one hand, reflective writing is safe in the sense that men may be more comfortable and less self-conscious expressing their resistance in writing rather than in the more public (and mixed gender) classroom; on the other hand, if men show their resistance in written form rather than in classroom discussions, the classroom environment may be a safer place for women to openly express themselves without fear

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Stuff Going to Make Us Better Teachers?'" (2000); and Turkel's "Teaching about Women to Male-Identified Students" (1986).

of being shut down by men's opinions or without self-censoring in anticipation of the

emotional needs of men in the classroom (Moore, 1997; Turkel, 1986).

Reflection can also take the form of small group discussions, individual

conversations between students, or in teacher-student conferences. Reflection has played

a part in feminist research on students' reactions to women's studies. In helping students

become aware of their reactions to feminism, Joycechild found that:

> Students … reported overwhelmingly that participating in the research gave them a fuller experience of the course. The opportunity to reflect on their experiences of the course, to name and shape their reactions in words with an attentive audience, and being able to learn co-researcher's reactions were all useful. Having a framework with pegs on which to hang strands of reaction and thought is useful in processing information and thinking critically. (cited in Lather, 1991, p. 128)

In my own research, one of my goals was to provide a safe place for men to critically

reflect upon their own masculinity as well as their relationships to women and feminism.

I felt that my research was successful in this respect. In talking with participants, I felt

each of them enjoyed our conversations, and many of them took the time to tell me

without any solicitation on my part. From the process of our dialogue, I observed

participants deepening their understanding of feminism, of themselves, and of the

relationship between the two. One powerful experience came in a brief window during

my third interview with Tucker, when he opened up to me to reveal that "I mean, I've

never really opened—or had like too many deep conversations with guys." Similarly, as I

mentioned in Chapter Two, Julius shared with me his experiences as a survivor of sexual

assault, something he had shared with only one or two other people in his life. This was a

very moving experience for both of us, and I felt that our conversations helped him to

better understand his experience and connect it with larger systems of oppression.

Many times, I could hear participants realizing and beginning to work through their resistance simply in response to questions that forced them to think consciously about and vocalize their thoughts in the presence of another person.[45] Although I did not explicitly position myself as feminist when introducing myself to participants, most of them assumed that I was pro-feminist to some degree. I felt that this assumption often made them feel slightly self-conscious about their resistance, but in a way that helped them to critically think about their positions. As I questioned why they felt a certain way, participants sometimes seemed to feel less confident in their resistance. For example, in our fifth interview, Jimmy discussed with me his working thesis for an upcoming women's studies paper. I will quote from the interview transcript at length here to illustrate Jimmy's thought process:

> *Jimmy*: Women have taken on some masculine qualities of strength or just being leaders in businesses and stuff. I think—and this is actually going to be my research topic—who's in charge in society? Women or men? In my opinion—and I'm going to draw references historically—now into the future, but I think that now, we're at the closest equal that we're ever going to get because it used to be that men would be in blue-collar jobs in farming and stuff so that put men in charge of women just naturally through physical stuff, historically speaking. Now, it's more so a white-collar world, where intelligence and cooperation—you know, feminine qualities, not necessarily exhibited by women—but feminine qualities will make you successful in life. So now I think we're kind of in limbo, like nobody's really in charge…. I think there's still inequalities on both sides. I gotta research it and stuff but I think it will be interesting topic to talk about which gender is in the hierarchy, and I don't think there is a hierarchy right now. I think women—look at the college entrance. There are more women going to college now than ever before, and more women than men. At the same time, women are becoming more aggressive drivers and are picking up negative masculine traits as well.... I just think it's very interesting that we're in a transitional period and a social shift. The big thing—I think in the future that women are going to be the

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[45] In the case of my participants, they expressed their thoughts to a white male positioned as sympathetic to feminism, which I felt was a significant factor in their more self-conscious questioning of their thoughts about feminism. While my gender as male was a factor that likely encouraged them to be more thoughtful in the process, I think that they would also respond thoughtfully to a woman-identified feminist teacher. Given the discussion above regarding their desire to be seen as a "good person," I imagine that they would go through a similar process of self-consciousness in the presence of any feminist teacher, male or female.

dominant gender and men will be a little bit subordinate. It won't be as obvious, but I think there'll be sort of a reversal. It won't be as obvious as men being dominant to women, but I think we're in a transitional phase.

Bob: How long do you think that transition will take?

Jimmy: I don't know. I don't even know if anybody's done any research on it. That's going to be speculation in the paper. I would say it's taken—since women can vote, from then till now with how much has changed in almost 100 years. So I think—I don't know—I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing—and I shouldn't say men in charge of women or women in charge of men. It's more masculine traits over feminine traits or feminine traits over masculine traits. You see what I'm saying? I think in the future for instance, a male that exudes a lot of feminine qualities could be superior, but it just seems to me—we might be a stopping point. I think we're in a crossroads, but it could be a stop sign, saying this is it: we're going to be equal. Am I making any sense here?

Bob: Do you think that it will be women or men that have more power?

Jimmy: That might be where were at a stop sign, because it will be like an equal thing because both men and women will have those qualities. Right now, I think we're right in the middle. I guess I should say American society, because global society is much more masculine, and in Third World countries, I think I will take a lot longer to change. I guess in Western society, that it's sort of—the old ideals of masculinity being top dog and you have to be strong to have to be in charge of women and inferior men, I think that's gone. It still might be prevalent in some extreme side, but I think it's gone. Men are holding more middle ground and women are holding more middle ground. I wasn't around 50 years ago, so I can't tell you how it was then. I don't know if I answered your question or not.

Jimmy's tone in this part of the conversation was hesitant and uncertain but also pensive. His abrupt shifts in thinking and phrases of uncertainty ("Am I making any sense here?" and "I don't know if that answers your question or not") indicated that he was self-consciously thinking about what he was saying and beginning to more reflectively question his original thesis. Although I do not think that he ultimately changed his thesis to a significant degree, he tempered his ideas somewhat. At the beginning of our next interview, when I asked about his thoughts on feminine qualities being more valued, he qualified to say "I think it's from more of an academic and economic standpoint." Simply

because I questioned Jimmy and was a witness to his thought process, our conversation marked a moment in which Jimmy was reflective about his beliefs.

In their interviews, both Edward and Stewart stressed dialogue with others as an important step in helping them to understand and personalize their relationship to feminism. When I asked Stewart about what aspects of his women's studies course he did *not* like, he replied:

> How big it is. I went from a community college to a class with a couple hundred people. I hate that. We have a recitation, but I'm one of those guys where if something comes to me, I want to talk about it. It's really weird for me to sit there and write it down and then come back to have to talk with the teacher later, like "what did you mean by this?"

Stewart was frustrated that he had to actively seek out his teacher in order to have a conversation with her, and he felt that his small group recitations did not provide him with the opportunity for dialogue that he saw as an important part of his learning process. Similarly, Edward spoke of the dialogue he encountered in small group settings as something necessary for a personal and worthwhile learning experience in facing the challenges of feminism:

> I guess with any difficult issue, especially in terms of personal growth, it's nearly impossible to sort of take any sort of step forward without talking it over with someone. I guess I've never met a person who is honest with themselves who can say "I dealt with everything on my own." People always say "I really appreciate the friends who went out of their way to help me in to give me advice and lift me up, those kinds of things."

Edward prioritized the need for dialogue with his professor, classmates, and friends who were willing to support his process of personal growth. For this reason, a sense of classroom community was important to Edward. Reflecting on his class, Edward said, "There was something about coming into that class every Tuesday and Thursday and sort of having friendships with these people that were being challenged like you."

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Because of the sense of community Edward felt in his classroom, he was more satisfied than Stewart with the pedagogy employed in his class and the learning experience he gained from it. In contrast to Stewart's experience, Edward felt that he had abundant opportunities to meaningfully interact with his professor, teaching assistants, and fellow students. His women's studies class was approximately one-sixth the size of Stewart's, and Edward frequently cited the relationships he developed with his women's studies professor and teaching assistants as a factor that helped him to understand and to personally care about course material:

> In terms of the class, the TA's were great advocates for what was being said, great resources and you know, having an accessible teacher [is important] in a course like that, in a course where you're going to have people whose beliefs are, you know, not being assaulted, but are coming into question every class. You are changing the worldviews of the students every time they walk into that class. And, it—it's something that requires constant attention. I think the co-facilitation method was a good way of making sure there was a lot of direct contact between students and teacher…. I've heard people taking the bigger intro to women's studies course. That's a much larger class. I think it's like 300 students. I think that if presented with the same ideas in that environment, I think I would have listened, but I think I would have been like, "Well, this is how the world is around me," not, "this is what *my* life is like." I think it was really easy for me to say, well, I understand all these things happening out in the world, but once it became personal, it became a lot more difficult. And you know, that's what that my class did. It made it personal in a way that was respectful, but was going to make the point clear.

As Edward noted, his finding a personal connection with feminism was accompanied by an understanding of the weight, complexity, and responsibility that comes with an analysis of one's relationship to privilege and oppression. Edward's sense of community in his classroom, though, allowed him to accept this challenge and open himself to feminist thought.

Although reflection can be beneficial to all students, Edward suggested that

reflection is an integral step for men in particular because not only are they implicated in

sexist oppression, but they are also socialized to detach themselves from their emotions:

> I remember in the spring, when I took Linda's[46] class, I often times was trying to speed through this sort of ingestion period. I would try to ingest it really quickly and then be like, "now what do I do next?" instead of sort of letting it marinate for awhile. And that was something I definitely didn't do as well as I could have. But [dealing with emotions] definitely plays a role, trying to get through it so quickly because a) you're not used to working with your emotions, and b) once you realize what they're talking about, you don't want to talk about it anymore, because all it does is implicate you as a member of a dominant and oppressive group.

Edward's experience learning to personalize feminism in a women's studies course

suggests that men who are given opportunities to participate in self-conscious reflection

might better understand and work through the discourses that comprise their resistance to

feminism. In the following sections, I will show how de-centering the masculine notion

of objectivity can further help men work though resistance to feminism and I will discuss

ways in which teachers might provide learning experiences similar to Edward's by

helping men recognize and personalize their stake in feminist thought.

De-centering Masculine Objectivity and Teaching Against Binaries

As I discussed in Chapter Five, Appeals to Authority, men learning feminism

often draw upon a masculinist notion of objectivity in their criticisms of the subjective

nature of much feminist thought. This notion of authority and objectivity also came into

play in men's assumptions that they were more objectively rational and correct than the

feminist scholars and teachers with whom they interacted. These assumptions provided

the basis for the discourse of strategy, wherein men assumed the position of authority to

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[46] At her request, Edward referred to his women's studies professor by her first name (which is represented here as a pseudonym).

criticize feminist action or strategy. Participants also assumed a position of objective

rationality in Chapter Six, Appeals to Moderation, when they characterized feminism as a

set of extreme viewpoints in contrast to their own moderate or liberal—but always

rational—perspectives. I propose that introducing students to elements of poststructuralist

feminism can help them situate the discourses of resistance discussed above and conceive

of knowledge and objectivity as social and historical constructions created and

maintained by systems of power—specifically by patriarchal masculinity.

Stemming from the work of Foucault, the notion of discourse itself has been a

foundation of poststructuralist thought, describing the ways in which enactments of social

and historical power are present in any given situation. According to Chris Weedon

(1987):

> Through a concept of discourse, which is seen as a structuring principle of
> society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity,
> feminist poststructuralism is able, in detailed, historically specific analysis, to
> explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the
> opportunities for resistance to it. (p. 41)

Although Weedon conceptualizes resistance as working against power, resistance in my

study was not something that worked *in opposition to* power. Rather, as shown in the

previous chapters, in the case of men learning feminism in women's studies classes, their

resistance instead served as an *enactment* or *reassertion* of their power and privilege.

Although the concept of discourse is generally agreed to be central to it,

poststructuralism itself—like feminism—has been notoriously difficult to define. Mimi

Orner (1992) provides a brief and helpful explanation of the intersection of the two:

> Feminist poststructuralist perspectives challenge the discourses of emancipation
> and the assumption of fixed identity and unified, rational subjectivity found in
> some feminist and much critical literature…" (p. 77)

For the purposes of this study, three features of feminist poststructuralist thought are relevant to helping men learn feminism: (1) an understanding of the fluidity of power; (2) a critique of objectivity; and (3) a critique of binary thinking. A poststructuralist understanding of the fluidity of power can help men understand possible disconnects between their privileges and their self-perception. A poststructuralist feminist critique of objectivity and a validation of subjectivity and uncertainty can help men understand critiques based on their appeals to authority and rationality. Similarly, a poststructuralist version of feminism can help students avoid unhelpful binary thinking by offering a helpful move from *either/or* to *both/and* thinking.

First, as I discussed in the chapters above, men learning feminism don't always understand their privilege, nor do they necessarily feel that they have power in society. In Chapters Three and Four, the discourses of victimhood and equity illustrated the ways in which men sometimes actually feel the opposite: that they are somehow disadvantaged within the current gender system. Drawing upon a Foucault's (1978, 1980) notion of power as something fluid and non-hierarchical, a poststructuralist feminist understanding of power might help men understand the ways in which they may be conferred privilege even if they don't feel privileged. Becky Ropers-Huilman (1998) describes a poststructuralist, Foucauldian concept of power as something that can operate on many levels, at times working against social hierarchies:

> Power is not something that is able to be grasped and held on to by people who have somehow found themselves at the top of a hierarchical system. Rather, power passes through and is exercised by persons and structures at all levels in all social systems. (p. 4)

Through such an understanding of the fluidity of power and the complex ways in which it may be situated and performed, men might be able to understand (1) that they can

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reproduce and enact power without feeling powerful or privileged and (2) that men are not the only ones capable of utilizing discourses of resistance as a way to reproduce and reinforce male privilege. Women, too, may draw upon the same discourses to reinforce male privilege and patriarchal systems of power. As Hytten and Warren (2003) discuss, discourses of resistance that enact and reinforce power are "not so clearly situated in those in power" (p. 67). Poststructuralist feminist thought can help men understand the situated-ness and the fluidity of their male privilege and help them think through alternative discourses through which to perform their privilege.

Kathy Hytten (personal communication, March 25, 2007) has talked with her students about privilege "as a performance that can be productively altered." To help her students understand discourses of resistance in learning about racism and white privilege, she asks her students to actively perform the discourses in the classroom to show resistance in action. Borrowing from Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979), students can interrupt the action and re-perform in order to disrupt the reinforcement of privilege in any given situation. Such reflective and reflexive understanding of privilege and performance may help men in women's studies better understand the active and performative reproduction of power in the classroom. Similar to the relationship between individuals and systems described above, students can realize that "human actors both construct and are constructed by the discourses in which they are located" (Ropers-Huilman, 1998, p. 3).

Second, poststructuralist feminism can offer students a critique of rationality and objectivity that might help them understand how their supposition of objectivity and their accompanying critique of the subjective nature of feminist thought both draw from and

serve to reproduce structures of power. In contrast, poststructural feminism speaks against dominant narratives and expands the types of knowledge that are meaningful and important. As Mimi Orner (1992) explains:

> By interrogating what have been called the master (i.e., white, European, male) narratives which have legitimized and naturalize Western thought, and which have excluded, repressed, spoken for and about women and men of color, white women, Jews, lesbians and gays, those with physical and mental disabilities and others, poststructuralists have helped denaturalize what has historically been constructed as "natural", "normal", "seamless", "real", and "true" by the master narratives." (p. 78)

Introducing students to elements of standpoint epistemology (Collins, 1991; Haraway, 1988; Hartsock, 1993) may help students avoid appeals to objectivity by providing them with an alternative understanding of knowledge that places a greater value on subjective experience. They may instead see how knowledge is situated and related to power, and they may more critically reflect upon how their own positionalities affect their perspectives and their notions of what serves as objectivity or truth.

Finally, and building from the above critique of master narratives and the idea of rationality, poststructuralist feminism can teach students to think beyond simple and reductive binary thought, offering instead the possibility that different and even contrasting perspectives can coexist and still hold truth in the subjectivities from which they are seen (Markowitz, 2005). As seen in the discourse of objectivity, some men in my study were uncomfortable with competing narratives. When confronted with two perspectives that seemed contradict one another, they often used binary logic, setting up *either/or* dynamics and concluding that one or both of them must be false. Significantly, though, they ultimately defaulted to dominant (and masculine) regimes of objectivity and

truth in ways that discounted women's subjectivity, discounted feminist thought, and reified male privilege.

As an alternative to binary thought, poststructuralist feminism offers *both/and* thinking—the possibility that competing narratives can coexist and both remain true. Such thinking allows for more complex understanding of truth, knowledge, and reality than the limiting and reductive *either/or* framework. The *both/and* framework can also be applied to the discourse of strategy to help men understand that feminists can focus *both* on the importance of their personal feelings and perspectives (what Tucker called "all these little negatives") *and* the importance of theorizing and enacting plans for action in a broader, more systemic sense. In other words, feminism simultaneously prioritizes *both* theory *and* practice; *both* personal *and* political; *both* individual *and* systemic change.

For Patti Lather (1991), helping students become comfortable with complexity is the essence of teaching: "Our pedagogic responsibility then becomes to nurture this space where students can come to see ambivalence and difference not as obstacles, but as the very richness of meaning-making and the hope of whatever justice we might work toward" (p. 145). Only through an understanding of the complexity of gendered oppression can student begin to work against it.

Helping Men Develop Personal Investments with Feminism

The findings of this dissertation suggest that men in women's studies may be less resistant to feminist thought if they can find ways to relate it to their individual experiences and if they perceive ways in which feminism can benefit them personally. Each of the men in my study who embraced feminism was forthcoming about his personal stake in learning it: Edward talked about his relationship with a female friend as

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something that both supported him and inspired him in his attempt to understand feminism; Kevin frequently discussed feminism as an outlet to help him compensate for his poor treatment of women earlier in life; Stewart began to better understand and more fully socially situate the reasons for his father's abusive treatment of his mother; Toby found a critical language for the lifelong anxiety he felt in relation to dominant masculinity, and he felt that feminism provided a safe space for understanding and more comfortably accepting his sexuality; and Julius felt that his women's studies course provided a safe place to learn more about his sexuality, "a refuge in a way, because you get to understand more about yourself." Julius's course also spoke to his experiences with poverty, racism, and sexual abuse (as a primary victim) and physical abuse (as a secondary victim through his mother).

Similarly, the men who showed more overall resistance to feminism were less resistant specifically when they related class material to their personal lives. For example, Tucker appreciated the Barrie Thorne (2001) reading because he felt that it related to his experience with gender in elementary school. Similarly, a turning point for Jimmy's reaction to his class was when he read an article on gendered patterns of communication between men and women:

> I just thought it was interesting because that was the kind of argument I had this weekend and over and over again, with my girlfriend and my mom…. The article just really hit close to home, because I was like wow—this class is nailing it. It's right on the money.

After this reading, Jimmy became more receptive to feminist ideas in our conversations, and he referred back to this reading frequently in other interviews.

Even when my participants began to see the ways in which they might actually benefit from feminism, they were sometimes frustrated by their women's studies courses.

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Not only were they concerned about women's wary perceptions of them as men, but they were also unsure about what exactly their roles might be as men in feminism. Stewart expressed some of these concerns in his final interview:

> It seems like men are alienated in a sense. Like it's all just mainly—in a lot of ways, you could take it as being like "men are really bad," you see what women have to deal with. If there's actually knowledge that men support this shit, too, they're right there fighting for it, too, then I think that would kinda—yeah, men fuck up a lot of shit, but at the same time, there are men out there going "yeah, this is something that needs to be changed."

Stewart's comments suggest the need for women's studies classes to provide male-identified students with examples of feminist men who might serve as role models as they rethink their own identities as men in relation to feminism. Through course readings, guest speakers, and examples from popular culture, feminist teachers can provide students with examples of pro-feminist men to provide role models and to help men feel included as allies in women's studies.

Interestingly, men may also draw from the discourse of dominant masculinity to actually embrace the challenge of feminism as something to be overcome in the pursuit of self improvement. Edward's initial reaction to feminism was stereotypically masculine in his conception of an almost heroic quest to overcome a challenge in order to come out a better person:

> I figure if I'm challenged, then I'll glean something from the experience, and be improved as a person. And so that was the impression I received from [my professor], and so I—there were no second thoughts about potentially leaving the course. It was clearly going to be worth my while.

Jackson Katz (2006) points out the irony that although the masculine norm is for men to be brave, bold, and courageous, the majority of men are silent in the face of sexist jokes

or sexist actions, even when they do not agree with such behavior. Thus, Katz asserts, it is actually more brave (i.e., "manly") for men to speak out against sexist behavior.

Part of helping men understand what they serve to gain from feminism includes teaching them about the ways in which men are sometimes hurt by the rigid limitations of the gender binary. Although men are not oppressed based on their gender in a patriarchal culture, they may still "suffer costs" (Kleinman et al., 2006, p. 138). Feminist thought can help students see that gender norms are limiting to both men and women. While men's gender norms are more valued than women's within most societies, all men still feel the pressure to live up to increasingly unattainable masculine norms (Katz, 2006). In this pursuit, they often engage in considerably riskier behaviors than women, resulting in more health problems and earlier deaths than women (Sabo, 2004). Men and boys who cannot enact hegemonic masculinity may turn to violence as an assertion of their manhood (Jhally, 1999; Katz, 2006; Katz & Jhally, 1999; Messerschmidt, 2000). In particular, for men and boys who lack the privileges of wealth and whiteness, exaggerated and dangerous forms of masculinity may serve as attempts to compensate for a deficit in other forms of power (Ferguson, 2000; Hurt, 2006; Sabo, 2004). Even men who are successful in performing "normal" masculinity may suffer from the emotional detachment of performing this masculinity. In short, regardless of the privileges or oppressions that shape and affect their daily realities, all men have something to gain from feminism.

Concluding Reflections

As I collected data from my participants over the course of a semester and became acquainted with them individually and in a collective sense, I was constantly conscious of

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the ways in which I interacted with them and the ways they might perceive me as a man. Particularly when participants spoke in ways that supported gendered inequality, the feminist within me wanted to directly challenge their ideas while the qualitative researcher in me felt obligated to reflect their thoughts and "patiently probe" (Glesne, 1999, p. 87) to better understand their perspectives.

Additionally, as I began to write an analysis of my findings, I struggled with how I would present my participants, all of whom I enjoyed meeting and whom I liked as individuals. I found it particularly difficult to write about the men whose stories comprise the bulk of this dissertation—James, Jimmy, and Tucker. Because this study focused on the ways in which they used discourses of resistance to feminism, and because some of their quotes may be offensive to my readers, I tried to portray them as I understood them: not as men who harbored ill will toward feminism or who necessarily consciously intended to hold onto their privileges, but as men working within larger dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity and male privilege. I hope I have shown the complexity of their engagement with feminist thought, and the ways in which they struggle to learn feminism. I also hope that their engagement with feminist thought and their own privileges will extend beyond their experience with women's studies and this research project.

When I began this research on men learning feminism, I assumed I would encounter a self-selection of my participants that would result in a split between men who saw themselves as pro-feminist and those who objected to feminist thought and offered overt resistance. Within this assumption, I also supposed that participants on either side of this split would be self-conscious about their resistance to feminism—i.e., that self-

described feminist men would reflectively describe their struggles to enact a feminist male positionality, and men who objected to feminism would be self-aware and intentional about their resistance. Thus, I was surprised and intrigued that some of my participants simultaneously inhabited both of these seemingly contradictory positions. Although they considered themselves to be feminist or pro-feminist men, James, Jimmy, and Tucker all spent a significant portion of their interviews voicing various critiques of feminism and enacting discourses that preserved their male privilege.

Another assumption that I had formed before this study was that men engaging with feminism would confront their masculinity, and thus face contradictions in doing so. From my pilot study on men learning feminism, I was aware of some of the conflicts and contradictions that feminist men face as they begin to understand and grapple with their male privilege. As my dissertation study progressed, I began to notice a different trend in the contradictions evidenced by my participants—specifically that some aligned themselves with feminism while spending a great deal of time critiquing it in ways that helped them avoid a confrontation with their privilege. I further noticed that some of the men in my study were speaking in discursive patterns that actually served to maintain or even reinforce their male privilege. I hope that this study has helped to illuminate the strategies by which this privilege is reproduced.

As I reflect on this dissertation study, I am left with questions for future research. Specifically, I wonder how students such as Tucker might react to the naming of discourses of resistance. A study of men's self-reflexive awareness of these discourses might better illuminate ways in which men and other students in women's studies can actively and productively engage with their resistance to feminism. Further, I want to

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complement this data with future studies that might more fully describe the conscious struggles of self-described feminist men, briefly suggested in this study through the comments of Edward, Kevin, and Toby. Finally, future research might explore the ways in which my findings connect with women learning feminism. Because the discourses used by men in my study represent dominant positions not easily situated only in those with power, I wonder how women might also invoke these or similar discourses of resistance in learning feminism. In this dissertation, I have attempted to offer feminist teachers and researchers an understanding of how men reproduce their privilege through discourses of resistance. I hope that future research will continue to examine the ways in which men and women enact and reproduce privileges in response to feminism and other forms of social justice education.

Are you a <u>man</u> taking a Women's Studies Course?

-If so, what do you think about it?

-Is feminism something that makes sense to you?

-Or, do you think Women's Studies might be anti-male?

I am conducting a research study to find out what men think about feminism. I'm interested in all kinds of responses to it: Do you like it, love it, hate it, or just don't get it? Tell me about it.

I'm looking for college men to participate in 12-20 hours of interviews this semester. Learn more about yourself and earn <u>$7 / hour</u> for interviews.

If you're interested, please contact me:

Bob Pleasants

bpleas@email.unc.edu

919.672.3937

Interview Consent Form
Life Histories of Men Learning Feminism

This consent form is to check that you are happy with the information that you have received about this study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you wish to take part in the study.

This study is looking at the life history of men who are learning feminism.. What was their life like growing up? How and why did they come to learn about feminism?

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you may end your participation at any time for any reason without penalty or consequence. There will be no personal risks associated with your participation in this study. This information gathered in this study may be used for publication and/or conference presentations. **Your identity will be kept confidential**. No names or other identifying information will be used during the taped interview (see below), on the interview guide, or in any material produced as a result of the study. We will interview a total of approximately ten participants.

With your permission, we would like to digitally record the interview in order to have an accurate and complete record of your responses. Agreeing to have the interview recorded is completely voluntary on your part. You can participate in the study without your responses being recorded and you can have the recorder turned off at any point during the interview or stop the interview at any point. Interview recordings will be destroyed after the completion of this project. The recorded interview will be reviewed only by us. Please see the attached Appendix C to learn about the kinds of questions that will be asked. If you become uncomfortable with talking about your personal history at any time, we will stop the interview or change the topic per your request. You may skip any question at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or would like to discuss this study further, please feel free to contact us:

Bob Pleasants   Dr. George Noblit
School of Education   School of Education
bpleas@email.unc.edu   gwn@email.unc.edu
919-933-8236   919-962-2513

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Behavioral Institutional Review Board at 919-962-7761 or by email to aa-irb@unc.edu.

___ I DO agree to participate in this study.

___ I DO NOT agree to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

How do you define feminism?

What does feminism have to do with men?

Would you recommend that other guys take this course?

Why/why not?

How has the course affected you?

Has it affected your relationships with women or made you think about those relationships differently?

Did you talk about sexual assault in class? Has the course made you think about sex differently in anyway?

Has it affected your relationships with men or made you think about those relationships differently?

Do you think your reaction to the class is typical of most guys?

What do you like about the course?

What do you think could be taught differently? How do you think they could make it more appealing to men?

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