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## Are They Listening?: Revisiting Male Privilege and Defensive Learning in a Feminist Classroom

Cameron A. Tyrrell

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Are They Listening?: Revisiting Male Privilege and Defensive Learning in a Feminist Classroom

By

Cameron A. Tyrrell

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

In

Gender and Women's Studies

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Are They Listening? : Revisiting Male Privilege and Defensive Learning in a Feminist  
Classroom

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4/4/2016

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's thesis committee.

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### **Abstract**

Privileged students, particularly male-identified students, in women's studies classrooms have been a population of study previously. Many feminist educators have encountered resistance from a male-identified student in their classroom. Scholarship has been done that analyzes the discourses around how male privilege is invoked by men in women's studies classrooms. This study defined defensive learning with specific acts of disengagement that hinder privileged students, particularly male-identified students in Gender and Women's Studies, from taking classes that are considered "feminist," and from learning about systems of privilege. A series of semi-structured interviews with six male-identified students who were enrolled in women's studies classes was conducted. The purpose of this study was to go in-depth on how privileged students learned and thought about privilege, privilege's role in defensive learning, and men's participation in feminism. The findings suggest that the participants identified as feminists, thought privilege should be widely taught to all students, particularly more privileged students, and that they would benefit from Gender and Women's Studies course content. Conversely, my study suggests that feminism being demonized in popular culture and misinformation about Gender and Women's Studies, as an academic discipline, can dissuade many privileged students from enrolling or participating in feminist and social justice projects. Recommendations for increasing enrollment in Gender and Women's Studies, teaching privilege, and avenues for future research are also discussed.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Feminist pedagogy developed out of the history of knowledge production grounded in the lived experiences of women from different racial/ethnic, sexual, class, abilities, and other backgrounds. The principles of feminist education often run counter to “objective” tenets of more traditional, masculinist, forms of “objective” learning (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Often educators, and colleagues, discuss how frightful and insensitive reactions from male students have been and that they dread their enrollment in their class. That seems a familiar narrative in the literature on resistance, and the discourse is almost entirely negative in connotation (Orr, 1993). This is not to say that feminist educators need to go the extra mile to protect male students’ feelings, but rather that their resistance is a place of scholarly knowledge that has not been sufficiently attended to aside from how it might intimidate other students from feeling comfortable in the classroom space. There is very little scholarship that has grounded men’s experience in women’s studies, specifically reactions to course materials and class environments, and asking individual men from different social strata how they feel and engage with feminism (if at all). I intend to further complicate the narrative of the “resistant male student” in this thesis project when I conducted interviews with male students enrolled in Gender and Women’s Studies courses. My goal was to go in-depth on how the lived experiences of men in women’s studies courses fit into, or runs counter, to the extant scholarship and narratives that tend to construct them as “resistant.” At the same time, this project does not seek to be an apologist statement that justifies or condones male students who create hostile learning environments. Nor did this project attempt to be a space where male students can vent about how negative their



experiences with feminism had been. Rather, this project seeks to understand their experience by inquiring about how they experience Gender and Women's Studies courses, grounding it in existing theories of feminist pedagogy and resistance. This is significant, not only because of the literature gap, but it can potentially be useful for feminist and social justice educators who want to shed light on male student experiences. This could potentially bring their experiences as privileged and socially situated actors into the classroom environment, rather than outliers deemed "unworthy" of being reached by practitioners of feminist pedagogy.

In this project I use the terms "disengagement" and "defensive learning," borrowed from the concept of resistance in education from Henry Giroux, to frame the ways in which male students may experience and express alienation from course materials and the classroom itself (Giroux, 1983). Defensive learning is not monolithic in how disengagement occurs among students, but I conceive "acts of disengagement" as the acts of resistance, grounded within a spectrum of acts, ranging from not contributing to class discussion to outright hostility.

### **Organization of Chapters**

In Chapter 2, I contextualize my research within the extant and relevant scholarship. This literature review consists of three main bodies of knowledge: feminist pedagogy, privilege studies, and men and feminism. The first section provides a background on feminist pedagogical theory, practices, and history and how that relates to the current institutional climates of undergraduate college campuses. The section on privilege studies examines the history of privilege as a mode of inquiry and analysis and it relates to both a feminist structural critique of culture and to male students in Gender and Women's Studies courses. The third section reviews literature about the place of men within feminism, particularly how men can ally with and embody feminist goals of gender equity and social change.

The third chapter details my methodology. In it, I discuss the scope of my project and provide a detailed account of my research methods as well as a discussion of the possible limitations present in the study. I also provide an explanation for the importance of attending to reflexivity in research and discuss the reasons for my selecting the topic of study.

The fourth chapter provides a detailed analysis of the themes that emerged in the interviews. Through this analysis, this chapter demonstrates the multifaceted experiences privileged individuals, specifically men, have in Gender and Women's Studies courses. This chapter argues that students' receptiveness to privilege, teaching privilege outside of the Gender and Women's Studies classroom, and how different embodiments of feminist pedagogy can make students more likely to engage and participate in feminism. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes this project with a discussion of the importance of my findings. Here I suggest uses for my research including departmental, institutional, student, and pedagogical implications.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is representative of the continued work that feminist scholars have, and continue to, contribute to the scholarly field by envisioning the necessity of continuing the goals of feminist education. Here I provide a focus on the stated goals of implementing feminist ideals into educational praxis, and the barriers that more positionally privileged persons can make real in classroom spaces. This literature review is focused on both the theoretical and practical consequences of feminist pedagogy. In this literature review I place the focus on the locality of cisgender men within feminist education, and the various contradictions that men occupy as subjects of feminist praxis. The three bodies of theory: of feminist pedagogy, privilege studies, and the extant theories on men participating in feminism are those that I identify as rooted in understanding the precarious position of men within feminist education that grounded the context of my research. This literature review also showed the need for further research be done to effectively address whether there is a place for cisgendered men to participate in feminist thinking and living.

### 1. Feminist Pedagogy

In order to understand the need for feminist education, we must first understand the goals and theory that ground feminist pedagogy as an ideology and practice within and outside the academy. Feminist pedagogy, grounded in the tradition of Paulo Freire and his contemporaries, is a core tenet of feminist educational praxis. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire conceptualizes a “democratic classroom,” in which all participants are equal “co-learners” investigating complex social and political issues (Freire, 1970). This co-learning approach

empowers students to think critically about how oppressive social systems of power and create uneven relations of power. Feminist pedagogy directly countermands the power structures outside the classroom. Feminist classrooms, established on “co-education,” can make male students, who have been privileged in “objective” and “rationally minded” classes, resistant to the democratic classroom model (Pleasant, 2011). The reason for such resistance is that a “co-educational” classroom does not privilege their voices, since feminist classrooms center on the lived experiences of women and the politics of gender oppression (Fisher, 2001). As first-time Women’s Studies students, some report feeling “attacked” or “singled out” because of their identity, as a result of being exposed to material that address systems of privilege. Male students express resistance to course materials, verbal and bodily hostility, or drop the class entirely. Freire cites the necessity of “conscientizing” even the “oppressor,” or in this case those who benefit from the products of social disadvantage (i.e. men, heterosexual, cisgender, etc.). It can be difficult for these individuals, as a result of rejecting a critical feminist lens, to see or accept themselves as the recipients of a system that leaves others disadvantaged. Resistance can be further exacerbated when cisgender men are the “token male” in the classroom, which can lead to a sense of isolation (Alilunas, 2011). That outsider experience could be beneficial for men learning feminism, as Freire conceptualized resistance as “an assertion of students’ agency” (Freire 1970). The danger lies in the context of that resistance, particularly *how* cisgender men resist feminist materials and ideologies.

Walker (2002) identifies six central principles of feminist pedagogy, that of: 1) Reformation of the relationship between professor and student, 2) Empowerment, 3) Building Community, 4) Privileging the individual voice as a way of knowing, 5) Respect for diversity of personal experiences, 6) Challenging traditional views. Walker’s review of these principles is

applicable to all students that feminist pedagogy wishes to empower. Adhering to these principles de-hierarchizes the feminist classroom from more positivistic, traditional classroom spaces where students are “talked at” rather than “talked with.” Tradition education has been a site of passive learning where lived experiences were deemed outside of the realm of knowledge production. Students of feminist pedagogy are empowered to give voice to their experiences and the power of naming them. As Walker (2002) notes, students are taken out of the mindset that learning is a “neutral cognitive process” and into a more active and liberatory one. The inversion of traditional learning allows for a greater experiential pluralism, and attentiveness to diverse voices from a multitude of backgrounds, to be learned from by instructors and students. In a later section, these principles are put into conversation with how cisgender male students might hinder critical pedagogy in the classroom through their resistance.

There have been studies to quantify the effectiveness of feminist pedagogy in reducing student prejudice and maximizing empowerment. Stake (2006) offers a critique of the backlash that WGS (Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) gets from the public and by those from other academic disciplines who see it as “illegitimate.” Stake’s critique argues how academic institutions often don’t offer support for WGS classes being offered under diversity course listings. There is limited funding offered to WGS departments for support can serve as barriers to feminist pedagogy catching on. Stake (2006) compiled multiple studies that measured student change over time and identifies how critics of WGS as a field often used very selective sampling when arguing its ineffectiveness. This meant failing to account for student change over time, which require longitudinal study. Stake’s piece offers findings that feminist pedagogy, and course content, was instrumental in empowering students to “challenge traditional values” which is a large principle in feminist thinking and teaching.

Other studies have been consistent with this, particularly Basu & Reinitz & Thomsen (1995). They sampled one hundred fifteen women and fifteen men and found, over the course of a semester, found an increase in feminist attitudes among women (but not men) and a decrease in beliefs of essential sex differences among men (Basu & Reinitz & Thomsen, 1995).

Stake and Hoffman's (2001) work found that students were more likely to experience a change in attitudes about social groups and to engage in activism as a result of enrollment in women's studies classes (Stake & Hoffman, 2001). Stake (2006) found a positive correlation among studies on student change in WGS courses, concluding that WGS and feminist pedagogy were significant in higher education to empower students to think in new non-normative ways. In a later section of this literature review, I go into more specifically how students become conscious systems of privilege. Stake concludes in her piece that:

First, we have evidence that WGS courses are successful in helping to develop egalitarian attitudes and commitment to social change for women and other marginalized groups.

Our results provide support for the valuable contributions of WGS course offerings and suggest the value of a campus diversity requirement that would assure that *all* undergraduates have a WGS experience (Stake, 2006, p. 209 emphasis added).

Scholars, both anti-feminist and feminist, have questioned the efficacy of structuring a learning environment based on the traditional consciousness-raising and Freirean "democratic" model (Fisher, 2001; Freire, 1970). Evidence suggests that student change occurs when feminist pedagogy is adhered to in WGS courses. Students' were being empowered to engage with knowledge production is essential to build a positive consciousness around social and political issues. There are students who can subvert the intentionality of feminist pedagogical goals. This

next section focuses on reviewing the scholarship on student resistance, particularly that of cisgender male students, in the feminist classroom.

### ***Men as Resisters to Feminist Learning***

Feminist educators have found that cisgender, heterosexual, male students often offer a great deal of resistance to feminist teaching practices. This “resistance” is a result of protecting their own privilege by invalidating systemic feminist critiques of patriarchal power and oppression. In a later section, I review the theories and scholarly contributions on exactly *how* male students distance themselves from the goals of a feminist classroom.

I used Alison Jaggar’s definition of feminism for how I saw a feminist classroom as a liberatory space for privileged students: “[as a space] seeking, no matter on what grounds, to end women’s subordination” (1983, p.5).

If a feminist classroom, with institutions mandating diversity courses for undergraduate students, is about teaching *all* students about gender oppression then a critical feminist lens can perhaps enlighten men on the cultural perils of masculinity. A later section specifically addresses the historical debate and scholarly work on men’s place in feminism, particularly in the classroom and other “feminist” areas.

The scholarship on male student resistance touched on the theory why male students resist without focusing much on the how. Student resistance has no uniform response pattern or predictability that teachers can expect to take place. As Lewis (1990), notes about male student resistance: “often exhibited in the more subtle forms of body language as in overt verbal behavior; the feminist teachers must be sensitive to this level of communication as well” (Lewis, 1990). I agree with Lewis that we need to see resistance, much like other abstract concepts, as

existing on a spectrum. Freire (1970) sees resistance as specifically an act of “agency” on the part of individual students. Giroux (1983) gives more of a clear picture of agency as not merely being oppositional, but rather that resistance theory: “redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with the logic of deviance, individual pathology, learned helplessness...with the moral and political indignation” (Giroux, 1983, p. 107). Giroux’s envisioning of resistance adds credence to students’ resistance and the gendering of masculinity since individual men are not conditioned to feel powerful from their own standpoint (Cataldi, 1995; Case, 2013; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997). Based on Giroux (1983), it becomes possible to theorize how male students could be brought into feminist with the six principles of feminist pedagogy identified by Walker (2002).

Orr (1993) contends a solution to “conscientizing” male students, based on Freire’s (1970) pedagogical theory, as feminist allies would be done by: “making the contradictions of masculinity visible to them; that is, by showing their position as simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (1993, p. 239). Several other educational theorists, particularly critical masculinity scholars (Case, 2007; Digby, 1996; hooks, 2002; Kimmel, 1997; McDavid, 1988), agree with Orr’s assessment that without making visible the limits of gendered expressions of men they cannot be made into allies or expected to not resist class materials and protect their privilege. Orr believes that: “the class of ideology: the feminism of the classroom against their internalized patriarchal masculinity” (1993, p. 242). Orr’s assessment renders patriarchal conditioning as that which leads men to believe feminism subverts their privilege, and their authoritative voice. Seeing themselves as “oppressor” and “oppressed” by the patriarchal caste system, male students can pivot their perspective from a reactionary entitlement to one more consistent with feminist questioning of the social constructions of systems of authority and oppression.



Moore (1998) problematizes feminist educators seeing resistant male students as a monolithically bad problem. In her article, she states:

What seems missing from current discussions of resistance are explorations of the possible positive effects of individual resistance on the class as a whole-effects that, when noticed, can lead teachers (and students) to re-examine or re-think the notion of resistant behavior altogether (Moore, 1998, p. 45)

Moore took excerpts from student journals from class assignments and sampled reactions to one particular student, identified as “Aaron.” Aaron was a very opinionated student who often interrupted other students and sided with very patriarchal mindsets in class discourse. While the majority of students expressed interest in having Aaron drop the course, several reflected that Aaron had challenged them through his contributions in class to think about feminism in a new way. From this perspective, Aaron’s “resistance,” as several educators would see as wholly problematic, can be framed as a positive aspect. It is positive, as Moore argues, because Aaron, while subverting feminist pedagogical principles, is not entirely a “problem” because he is a male student who disagrees with some of the course offerings. Moore, and I would agree, that there should be a space for voices of dissent in feminism. It should also be noted that not only male students present “resistant” behaviors and that not all resistance comes from patriarchal conditioning. Many educators have encountered women students who have mindsets that run counter to feminist interests due to the perception of feminism in popular culture (Digby, 1996; Fisher, 2001; hooks, 2002; Kimmel, 1997). Oftentimes, students don’t wish to engage in the kind of involvement feminist courses offer (Case, 2013; Kimmel, 1997; Orr, 1994; Wolff, 1991). I argue that “resistance” is not simply embodying a voice of dissent in a classroom. If feminist pedagogy involves empowering voices as a primary principle there should be space for a

multitude of readings to be given representation, even if student sentiments might run counter to what other students and teachers believe is “appropriately” feminist. The difficulty is to identify resistance and defensive learning, when it is solely antagonistic, and bring attention to it in the classroom space to identify if those acts are manifesting in order to protect systems of privilege.

Speaking about her difficulties encountering written resistance from her students, Wolff (1991) provides a critical contribution to the difficulties a teacher faces. She analyzed undergraduate students’ writing samples in which she specifically looked for “resistance to knowledge” by asking seven key questions of identifying resistance to the knowledge conveyed in class. The subject of the writings was on how society is gendered. Wolff identifies herself as having been teaching from a “position of ignorance” (Wolff, 1991, p. 490). Being in a position of authority shows how educators’ precarious position of authority can subvert what educational theorists would call “positive resistance” (Giroux, 1983). Positive resistance, and the agency involved with students naming their viewpoint, is meant to be first step in students fulfilling the empowerment aspect of feminist pedagogy. I would agree with this, as teachers can facilitate student dialogue through difficult subject matter as a means of consciousness-raising (Fisher, 2001; hooks, 2002; Webb et. al., 2002).

Feminist pedagogy is pertinent to build students into a community of learners. Due to Gender and Women’s Studies, as a field, largely populated by women, where men are often the minority in the classroom. Alilunas (2011) identifies the stigmas that men face even being enrolled in GWS classes, and have their privileged identity markers questioned by their peers. This can make protecting one’s privilege appealing, as Miner (1994) found in her research. Oftentimes, cisgender, heterosexual men would be seen as “players” trying to date women enrolled in a Women’s Studies class. Oftentimes the heterosexuality of male students would be

called into question by their peers for showing an interest in taking such a course, as if heterosexual men could not possibly have any interest in issues of gender equity. The parallel in Miner (1994) and Alilunas's (2011) work was the thought that course materials were often "male bashing." The disempowerment men felt was unique to them being pushed into a minority status in the classroom, where they were often relegated to a "listener" rather than a more traditional, hegemonic, speaker role (Miner, 1994). In reading student evaluations, Miner theorizes that the heteronormative, social constructionist critique of gender, institutions, and culture contested traditional views that conferred status to individuals outside of the room. Therefore, I agree with Miner (1994) that the protection of male privilege, heterosexual privilege, white privilege, cisgender privilege and other privileges is exacerbated by men's minority status in the classroom. Alilunas (2011) argues that men participating in the "heavy lifting" of integrated feminist spaces challenge the notion that feminism is solely "for women" (Alilunas, 2011; Kimmel, 1997). I would also argue that the outsider status that men experience can also be a unique standpoint in the classroom space. It allows them a unique perspective they may not have been aware of before. This standpoint can be a key site of knowledge production that can allow male students to confront their privileges and contribute to the discourse of the classroom. A major difficulty lies in validating the worldview of all students, even resistant male students, based on the principles of democratic teaching that feminist pedagogy strives for. Male students who disengage are conceived as "defensively" learning to protect and reify their privilege. Educators calling attention to men's visibility in feminist classrooms can be imperative to incentivizing men enrolled in Gender and Women's Studies classes to participate as allies in feminist struggle. The next section addresses the literature of Privilege Studies, the many forms of privilege male students can occupy, and how it relates to theories of resistant male students.

## 2. Privilege Studies

A feminist analysis of power has mainly centered on how systems of oppression impact marginalized groups in society. This lens relies on looking at the manifestations of the disadvantage as a result of said systems, rather than the advantage bestowed upon those privileged by those systems. Privilege Studies as an academic discipline can be attributed to two seminal essays by Peggy McIntosh “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” and “White Privilege and Male Privilege.” In both of these essays, McIntosh reflects on how she as a white woman is positionally privileged as a result of the system of racism that disadvantages people of color. The other essay demonstrates awareness of how men are privileged by the system of sexism. Both essays, and McIntosh and other scholars continued work in the discipline, allow for in-depth conversations about privilege awareness to take place (McIntosh, 1988; McIntosh, 1989). Implementing the Freirean model of a “democratic classroom” is to “conscientize” to how students are political actors and subjects outside of the classroom and also within it (Freire, 1970). Privilege awareness and scholarly analysis of privilege can help academics and educators articulate a need for social justice education among more positionally advantaged individuals such as male students (Case, 2013). Privilege Studies, and scholarship that intersects with it, can be linked back to consciousness-raising, in which feminists would discuss political subjects that affected women in order to center gender oppression and its everyday effects on their lives (Fisher, 2001). Privilege Studies, and my research, takes a different approach by looking at the *advantage* afforded male students and other privileged subjects to incentivize them to become advocates for social justice and change (Case et. al. 2012; McIntosh, 2012). This section

discusses the scholarship within the body of Privilege Studies knowledge, how it intersects with feminist educational principles, and how this knowledge was utilized to meet my research goals.

There are a multitude of systems of oppression, and the same can be said of systems of privilege. Drawing from the Privilege Studies scholarly tradition, Case (2013) provides a key educational framework to demonstrate privileged identity manifestations to students in feminist classrooms. For instance, examples include different activities for class privilege, male privilege, Christian privilege, white privilege, etc. The various forms of identity privilege can be an intimidating task for educators since privileged students can disengage from the activity if they feel it antagonizes them as individuals. Case (2013) states that it is important to use an intersectional lens to look at privilege much as feminists look at oppression. Intersectionality, a term coined by feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, is a methodological tool to see how different forms of oppression and power intersect to disadvantage marginal populations (in her case women of color being adversely affected by racism and sexism simultaneously) (Crenshaw, 1991). By inverting this model, my research borrowed from Case (2013) to implement an “upward” intersectionality which demonstrates how privileged identities can intersect for societal advantage of privileged individuals in the opposite way that Crenshaw’s intersectionality tool. My research built off of Case’s (2013) when she writes:

To promote learning about privilege, educators may draw parallels between white privilege and other privilege systems, acknowledging that virtually everyone possesses some kind of privilege based on social identity. Each individual carries privilege in some areas versus subordinate status in others. Intersectionality scholars point out that many privileged and oppressed social identities interact simultaneously within each individual (Case, 2013, p. 23)

I think bringing this idea to the center of my research helped incentivize my participants to think critically about their lived experience of privilege. Case addresses the benefits of this theoretical (intersectional) approach for the purpose of conversation momentum:

Using this [approach] helps...for a couple of reasons: a) it provides students an avenues for conceptualizing privilege outside racism and whiteness, allowing critical examination of privilege within a potentially less threatening context; and b) it actually pre-empts the common tendency for Whites in these discussions to change the subject to some other area in which they are not dominant, but rather, a member of a subordinate group (Case, 2013, p. 23)

As I discuss later, a goal common among feminist and social justice educators is to maximize consciousness and student engagement and minimize resistance. Case's points are a model specifically tailored to this end, in which resistance is brought into conversation more entitled and resistant students can draw and see connections to others' lived experiences of marginalization from various experiences of identity categories (Case, 2013).

This framework of "upward" intersectionality is not only theorized by Case (2013). It is called for in McIntosh (2012), as she revisits the field that she founded in her foundational essays. In discussing what is needed in future scholarly works on privilege, she says that Privilege Studies is necessary because:

We who study privilege systems should argue what we know to be true-that the study of power is not accurate unless it includes both disadvantage and privilege, and maps the differentials in power between those people and paradigms that have been given less importance and those that have been given more, on arbitrary grounds (McIntosh, 2012, p. 195).

Mapping systems of privilege is what I want my research to address in studying male students in Gender and Women's Studies. Intersectional research, McIntosh states, is "inaccurate if it leaves out privilege, the up-side of discrimination" (McIntosh, 2012, p. 195). McIntosh's (2012) update on Privilege Studies is that we need the privilege "investment" of privileged individuals if social justice is to be achieved. A mass movement grounded in anti-racist, anti-sexist work cannot simply be based on empowering those disadvantaged, but instead can work to challenge those in power to not indulge in complacency. I would argue that it is essential that privileged individuals be empowered to think differently based on social justice activist and feminist educator models of education. McIntosh (2012) argues the importance of "individual effort," and that privileged people writing about privilege are often:

Only [writing] about deficits, barriers, and discrimination, and cannot yet see exemptions, assumptions, and permissions granted by privilege. I am convinced that studies of oppression will not go anywhere toward ending oppression unless they are accompanied by understanding of the systems of privilege that cause the systems of oppression (McIntosh, 2012, p. 204)

McIntosh's call for an equal focus on oppression from a privileged angle is attended to in the methods and analysis of my research on male students and their experiences in Gender and Women's Studies classrooms.

Privilege itself is not monolithically defined, but has been understood in the "knapsack" metaphor that McIntosh provided when first writing on white privilege (McIntosh, 1989). Both Chang and Hays (2003) and Case et. al. (2012) provide more explicit and up-to-date definitions of how privilege awareness and allyship can be fostered amongst privileged individuals. Case et.

al. (2012) notes the precarious nature of the term “privilege,” and builds off of McIntosh’s (2012) of a need for an analysis of privilege from an intersectional framework:

An intersectional framework promotes extension of privilege studies beyond the domain of race, where much of the scholarly and popular work has been focused, to other important identity markers (e.g. gender, class, religion, and sexual orientation) (Case et. al., 2012, p. 2)

Chang and Hays (2003) offer a definition in their article for understanding white privilege as well as speaking to the ways privileged political actors deny oppression’s existence:

White privilege is the belief that only one’s own standards and opinions are accurate (to the exclusion of all other standards and opinions) and that these standards and opinion are defined and supported by White in a ways that continually reinforce social distance between groups, thereby allowing White to dominate, control access to, and escape challenges from racial and ethnic minorities...[it is] based on the belief that allocation of resources is a result of the superiority of Whites, that minorities are responsible for their social and economic problems, and that individuality and mobility are available to all and are necessary to succeed in society (Chang and Hays, 2003, p. 135)

This quote allows for a vivid illustration of White privilege, and one need only replace Whiteness at the center and put any other system of privilege (heterosexism, classism, sexism) at the center of this to understand that hegemony operates at the expense of the disadvantage, and to the complacent blindness, of the privileged. Chang and Hays (2003) definition and analysis of White privilege and critique of multiculturalism are valuable to my research. Particularly when popular pedagogical theory endorses a multicultural “one-size-fits-all” model of classroom and student development it is necessary to study the differences students experience as social,



cultural, and political actors (privileged and disadvantaged) outside the classroom that may not ring true inside of it (Guess, 2006). The attentiveness to cultural competency, as well as diversity, in Chang and Hays (2003) is something that I was mindful of in formulating the interview questions and analyzing my data on male students in Gender and Women's Studies courses.

Chang and Hays (2003) critique how white privilege and racial identity are "seldom addressed" in counselor education and supervision, since the majority of counselors are white (Change and Hays, 2003). Chang and Hays' (2003) have the same challenge of dispelling the cultural "myth of meritocracy" that privileged individuals often cite as a true social and cultural reality. Chang and Hays (2003) also offer a critique of "multicultural education" as a means of teaching since it still is hierarchized in a white racial model (Guess, 2006). The parallel of privilege awareness in counseling is relevant to feminist pedagogy since allies (and ally behavior) are needed in all fields to counteract hegemony. Research shows the educational praxis in consciousness-raising around privilege in Diversity Courses is effective in increasing ally behaviors in students (Case, 2007; Case, 2012).

Coming from the disciplinary background of Psychology, Case et. al.'s (2012) work necessitates my research on feminist pedagogical grounds, since, as they put it: "Research on privilege brings dominant group advantages into sharp focus, making this unrecognized element of oppression and internalized domination visible" (Case et. al., 2012, p. 3). This method of "making visible" is parallel to the Freirean model of "conscientization" by making social inequities visible to members of privileged social groups (Freire, 1970). Attempts at instilling ally behaviors in students is still necessary given McIntosh (2012) and Case et. al.'s (2012) call for attention to various forms of privilege was attended to in my research and how I engaged

with my participants. This next section addresses how white privilege and male privilege are made real in the extant Privilege Studies research and how that intersects with feminist pedagogy and my own research project.

### ***Privilege Made Real in the Feminist Courses***

Male students in Gender and Women's Studies classes can enter unaware of the privilege they hold in the hegemonic system of power that "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" blinds them to (hooks, 2002). This section addresses how white privilege and male privilege have been made visible, and how they are best dealt with in teaching about social justice and attaining feminist goals of any lasting sort. The "systemic advantage" afforded privileged individuals in Diversity courses was researched by Case (2007), who used a Leikert scale to measure changes in attitudes, over the course of a semester, of White students against racial and ethnic minorities. Case (2007) notes the "cognitive dissonance" in white students about systemic disadvantage experienced by people of color, and how: "Greater awareness of privilege might lead to more guilt as Whites confront the reality of their unearned advantages" (Case, 2007, p. 233). The concept of "White guilt" or "White fragility," is a way that White students often cope with learning that their advantages, and their belief in "meritocracy," are at the expense of others by an unfair system based on race. Defensive learning is a key part of theorizing about privilege and learning about systemic oppression, and it frames awareness and consciousness-raising around privilege not only as a reflection of bad moral character on those that have privilege. Antagonism leads many White students to distance themselves from course materials, as well as from engaging with people of color for fear of doing further harm (Case, 2007; Case, 2013). This distance, however, can be a manifestation of privilege in that the privileged actor gets to choose when, if, and how they engaged with people different than them based on an arbitrary phobia of

“doing something wrong” (Case, 2007; Case, 2013; Pleasants, 2011). This is also called “white fragility,” the relative unease privileged people have talking about privilege, particularly when it comes to White people and the topic of race (Case, 2007; Case, 2013).

However, the “guilt” and “fragility” model don’t only apply to White people and students. The same can be said of other systems of advantage for privileged people, such as men. This is what makes sexism, and challenging culturally conditioned patriarchy, difficult for male students to not want to disengage from (Case, 2007; Case, 2013; Chang and Hays, 2003; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997; Pleasants, 2011). They are caught between what they’ve been taught to think and what they are being told is a falsity meant to maintain a dominant power structure. This can be difficult for them to hear as they are complicit in those systems regardless of intention. Understanding *how* to incentivize students and privileged people to “invest” their privilege and extend ally behaviors to those that are disadvantages by systems of oppression becomes the concern, as Case (2013) speaks to in numerous chapters of her book (Case, 2013). A space of discourse empowers privileged students to engage with their own privilege as a means to change an “unjust” world. The sense of powerlessness that is inherent in the “guilt” or “fragility” model of consciousness can be deferred, if not altogether avoided (Case, 2013; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997). I argue in my research that through my interviews with male students a method was achieved to bridge the gap to incentivize students to come to social justice and maximize allyship and course engagement with feminist course materials, and minimize the occurrence of “guilt” or “fragility.” The final section focuses on the discourses male students can rely on to reify systems of privilege and disengage from feminist knowledge.

In his article, Pleasants (2011) interviewed eight male students who had taken Gender and Women’s Studies courses at his primarily white institution. Maximizing personal connection

in his in-depth interviews, Pleasants was able to get into the reactions that male students had to feminism and Gender and Women's Studies course materials, as well as the faculty and students that populated the classes that they were in (Pleasants, 2011). Their minority experience in the classroom, which wasn't the first scholarly piece on how this phenomenon affects men. Pleasants found the parallel identified previously of men feeling "singled out" for being male in their courses (Alilunas, 2011; Pleasants, 2011). Through his interviews, Pleasants identified and analyzed the specific discourses that made male privilege, and appeals to knowledge and personhood, real in the interview itself by the participants.

In his research, Pleasants (2011) found three main appeals in his data analysis: Appeals to Self, Appeals to Progress, and Appeals to Authority. Appeals to Self were identified in four subcategories of discourses: guilt, taking offense, victimhood, and intentionality. Appeals to Self were men protecting themselves and their personhood from the perceived "attack" that feminism, and other students, had been made against them. Showing guilt would allow them to resist in the classroom and ideologically. Taking offense would manifest in appeals such as that "men are victims too," and that feminism is skewed to paint men in an antagonistic light. The discourse of intentionality was male students saying that feminism could be "more gentle" in how it depicted men; as if gendering "feminism" to be nurturing and coddle their privileged status is the purpose of social change toward gender equity. Appeals to Progress occurred when participants brought up the "postfeminist" sentiment of identity categories, such as race, class, gender as no longer having social or cultural relevance. This fallacy places feminist struggle as a thing "of the past" and presents the false notion that "we're all equal now." Post-feminism makes feminist course materials seem antiquated and that feminist thought and knowledge are simply misrepresenting reality. Finally, Appeals to Authority from participants drew upon a masculinist notion of

objectivity, seeing feminist knowledge as overly subjective and lacking academic “legitimacy” and empirical findings. Pleasants (2011) identified discourses of resistance as overlapping and reinforcing of one another. Oftentimes, multiple appeals (such as to self and authority) prioritized participants’ (men’s) feelings and perspectives over women’s. Discourses served to fundamentally reify privilege. Pleasants concluded that these discourses can be navigated through by conscious and active pedagogy that puts students in critical dialogue and consideration with systems of oppression. Particularly, how student’s intentions are often divorced from the consequences of one’s actions.

Pleasants’ (2011) framework was essential in how I analyzed my interview data, since our studies are relatively similar in construction. Mine didn’t exclusively focus on a discursive analysis, but this research was an invaluable part of the scholarly canon around resistant male students to feminist teaching. My research centered on disengagement existing on a spectrum, and discourses were a part of students’ agentic capacity was used to distance themselves from “conscientization” rather than toward potential ideological engagement (Freire, 1970). My research project was intentional in using the term “defensive learning” in place of disengagement, since one informs the other, as disengagement is sometimes a direct reaction to how privileged students become defensive in classroom spaces. This next section reviews the literature on men and feminism, specifically the role men have as agents of feminist struggle, how men are or are not recognized by other feminists. This was done to examine the potential for male students to find a place to participate and become agents of change by engaging with feminist course materials in Gender and Women’s Studies courses.

### 3. Men and Feminism

Feminism has long been a space of liberatory knowledge production and activism for women working to strive for political, cultural, economic, and justice-oriented social change. Men, being privileged (often by more than one system of oppression) by the forces feminism critiques, occupy a contradictory position when they wish to participate in feminism. This section reviews the literature on men's historic place, and the debates around it, within feminism and social justice. I argue that men's participation is necessary for the education and radicalization of men for justice-based social and cultural movements to gain traction.

When it comes to the topic of positionally privileged (i.e. cisgender, heterosexual, men) persons being present in the spaces of the feminist classroom one controversial issue has been the disruption of male resistance to feminist pedagogical methods. Many scholars take an absolutist approach to this issue, as many feminist educators have called for gendered segregation in classroom spaces for women to be "left to their own devices," as radical and lesbian feminists maintained during the Second Wave of feminism (Fisher, 2001). Since feminism has historically been a place for women to be empowered in the process of knowledge production, this is something I agree with. However, as Kimmel notes, this allows men "off the hook" as it further manifests privilege by men being able to be distant from feminist participation. Others even maintain that the potential resistance of men, as McDavid notes, can be instrumental in demonstrating the conflicts that cultural conditioning (such as learned sexism) can be for men (McDavid, 1988). I think privilege awareness and guilt can be a part of social justice education for individuals who are positionally advantaged by systems of oppression. This is not to say that feminist course materials should coddle men, but rather that those willing to participate, while being critical of how they benefit unjustly from such systems at the expense of

others, could be allowed a seat at the table if they're willing to do the work of dismantling the privilege they benefit from systematically. Digby (1996), in his seminal book *Men and Feminism*, in which areas feminist issues, such as dating and parenting, were spoken about from the standpoint of a male feminist perspective. Aspects of this book can prove useful as a feminist pedagogical tool adapted to engage male students critically with their male privilege can. It provides specific examples of how men can be better partners, neighbors, and human beings to women and other people in general through their participation in feminism (Digby, 1996). Digby notes the cultural stigma against men identifying as feminists, as he experienced odd looks from men and women alike for identifying as a feminist (Digby, 1996). The world is rife with "Men's Rights Activists" who boast that masculinity is a finite resource that is being depleted with feminism running rampant. The reactionary pattern of male privilege protection would undoubtedly continue, if Ewing and Schacht's (1997) critique of the "men's studies" scholarly movement is any indication (Ewing and Schacht, 1997). Digby's work, along with that of like-minded male feminist advocates like Michael Kaufman, Michael Kimmel, and Jackson Katz illustrate the roles men can take on within the "men's studies" or "critical masculinity studies" scholarly field and have their work grounded in a critical feminist lens of gender analysis. This way men are not further privileged by the work produced by male feminists but rather men are empowered to "unlearn" and be accountable for the education of other men in much the same way that White anti-racist activists take on the role of educator for other White activists about systemic racism in "teachable moments" (Case, 2013; Case et. al. 2012; Fisher, 2001; hooks, 2002).

Male privilege in its varied manifestations is a difficult phenomenon to quantify. In her study, Case (2007) mapped the manifestations of male privilege awareness, and forms of sexism

in three different Diversity courses. Case (2007) found that benevolent sexism, or sexism that is “paternalistic” or claiming to know what is better for women because women lack the ability for their own self-determination (an assumption based on culturally held sexist beliefs on women’s ever-changing state caused by being “overly emotional”) was present in both women and men respondents to the prejudice, while hostile sexism (more overt statements and acts based on sexist beliefs) were much less likely. Case (2007) notes that further research should develop a frame to map out benevolent sexism among student attitudes. Case (2007) found that male students were more likely to self-identify with feminism: “with more exposure to feminist theory, personal stories, and statistical data documentation ongoing institutional discrimination against women” (Case, 2007, p. 427).

Case (2007) was not the first study historically to find prejudice reduction among students from Gender and Women’s Studies, and other Diversity courses (Case, 2007; Case, 2007). In her study, Case (2007) found that Women’s Studies courses had more awareness of male privilege and sexism, and that: “a positive shift in male privilege awareness occurred for women’s studies students during the course. Women’s studies students also identified themselves as feminists significantly more at the conclusion of the courses” (Case, 2007, p. 431). With the exception of “benevolent sexism,” a positive relationship was found in male privilege awareness was found to be associated with Gender and Women’s Studies courses (Case, 2007). Male privilege awareness among students was occurring over the course of the semester in Case’s (2007) study. The positive correlation of privilege awareness to social justice oriented courses can educate and how privilege can be explicitly addressed to maximize participation and minimize disengagement among students.



Male students have a differential experience with exposure to feminist course materials. Miner (1994), discussed earlier in this review about men's minority experience in the feminist classroom, brought this up in analyzing how men learn about feminist concerns from a different standpoint:

That is, 'relatedness' works in various ways: while men in [*sic*] may not be able to relate to the subject position depicted in many of our readings, they certainly may relate to the watcher/voyeur position-and for some of them, this was disquieting (Miner, 1994, p. 458)

Male students choosing to participate in feminist courses should be empowered to speak about their reactions to course materials. This is not to say that they should dominate discussion, but rather that the unique positional standpoint they occupy is markedly different from that of women students. Facilitating a critical dialogue about the way men are culturally conditioned to "see" women the way patriarchy wants them to can offer men insight and help in confronting their own male privilege (Case, 2007; Case et. al. 2012; Kimmel, 1997; McDavid, 1988). This lifts the burden of "forcing" male students to speak if they feel antagonized by the classroom environment. Disengagement, as scholars have argued, that men's being able to sit passively is merely another manifestation of male privilege, in that:

Even men who claim to be feminists always have the option of choosing when and how to enact those beliefs, in what contexts, or to drop them in moments of inconvenience (Kimmel, 1997, p. 183).

Male students critically engaging in anti-sexist, anti-racist discussions in Gender and Women's Studies courses incentivized them to be justice oriented in their lives. Male students need to be shown that alliances based on feminist interests are important, and possible, by holding communion with others in Gender and Women's Studies classrooms. I argue that with a

competent pedagogical framework addressing how privilege can lead to differential experiences of learning. If feminism is meant to enlighten all students to systems of oppression and for them to act as agents of social change, feminist pedagogy inside of the academy should account for privileged perspectives in course materials in much the same way feminism is attentive to a multitude of voices of oppressed people. This allows for a more vivid tapestry of mapping power that feminism has the potential to analyze. In speaking about the need for communion for male students, Alilunas says:

[In order] to see coalition, to ask for help and leadership, and to avoid reinforcement of power are all ways in which coalition offers a chance for genuine change. This is by no means an easy task; men are culturally inculcated with a sense that masculinity is, in part, defined by leadership (Alilunas, 2011, p. 221)

A collaborative environment of “co-learning,” as discussed earlier necessitates feminist educators meet students where they are at. Feminism may not have historically been a place where men or even male identified feminists were, welcomed. But the implications of men being able to learn about radical political ideologies that can change their view of the world are invaluable to the transformative potential of feminist pedagogy. This is not to say that feminist educators have an easy task, as no “resistant” student is ever easily dealt with, but that it is necessary to not simply give up on male students who are disengaging from course materials because it challenges the way they have been conditioned to see the world (Alilunas, 2011). The burden of ending gender oppression falls on both men and women if it is to be attainable in any lifetime. As bell hooks says, “Until men share equal responsibility for struggling to end sexism, feminist movement will reflect the very sexist contradictions we wish to eradicate” (hooks, 2002,

p. 83). hooks reminds me that if men are not taught to be conscious and act from an anti-sexist methodology then their allyship is never something that can be assured in the future.

This literature review has delved into three bodies of scholarship: 1) Feminist Pedagogy, 2) Privilege Studies, and 3) Men and Feminism to contextualize the scholarly conversation around my research project on defensive learning in male students in Gender and Women's Studies. My review of the literature has shown the necessity for my research, given the gap that exists as to how feminist educators can best maximize involvement of male students in courses and minimize disengagement so that male students can be invited to participate as an equal part in the feminist educational process. My research was attentive to the broad spectrum of "resistance" envisioned by scholars in education (Fisher, 2001; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 2002; hooks, 2003). My interview questions attempted to go in-depth on prompting my participants on how those within the literature conceive resistant acts and if those might coincide with those of participants. While "resistance" is not unilaterally defined by scholars, in the interviews of my research I sought to find the correlation between how the male students I interviewed experienced their own feminist education based on the literature reviewed here; as well as what might be the best practice for feminist educators struggling, or continuing to struggle, with defensive learning in their own classrooms. My research was beneficial for male students and feminist educators by building upon the previous scholarly knowledge produced around this topic. The next chapter focuses on the methodology this research project used to obtain the necessary data for analysis from participants.

### Chapter 3: Methodology Statement

While taking my first Gender and Women's Studies course I began to understand how my privilege had obscured how I viewed the world. This came into play when it came to listening to other people's experiences and validating them, which was reinforced by my cultural belief that there was some objective truth that others were more able to see than others. As I began to unlearn the myths that had been instilled in me by patriarchy, I realized that my resistance and grasping onto my privileged identities in the classroom was doing harm to those around me. I was learning, but at the expense of a space for others in my class to feel the same sense of empowerment that I began to feel. I began to question, in my continuing education, how feminist pedagogy can be deployed to bring privilege into sharper focus in Gender and Women's Studies classes. What is meant to be a teaching style meant to subvert traditional practices of teaching grounded in positivistic and masculine positions of authority instead is undermined often by resistant male students. Their disengagement is a distraction from course objectives and can often be dispiriting for educators trying to empower students to contribute in what could quickly become a site of confrontation among students. The hindrances of male students enacting privilege to disengage from feminist pedagogy led me to question how different male students think about and make sense of their experiences and place within the feminist classroom, particularly where they might be one of the only males present. To go in-depth on this topic, I interviewed male students enrolled in Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The purpose of this study was to explore male students' experiences in Gender and Women's Studies classes, how these experiences are influenced by their positionality and privileged identities, and what causes them to possibly disengage from participating in the feminist classroom. I hypothesized that male students experienced alienation and distress from

feminist course materials. If they had never learned they are socially privileged as males then this might have caused them to disengage in a variety of ways. It was my intention that gathering this data would allow future researchers and educators to bring male students' experiences with their privileged identities into context. This could engage male students to participate in feminist courses for the benefit of the classroom environment.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Feminist pedagogy, grounded in the tradition of Paulo Freire and his contemporaries, is a core tenet of this project. A common obstacle to feminist pedagogy is the resistance of cisgendered men in the classroom (Case, 2013; Fisher, 2001; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire conceptualizes a “democratic classroom,” in which all participants are equal “co-learners” investigating complex social and political issues (Freire, 1970). This co-learning approach empowers students to think critically about how oppressive social systems of power create uneven relations of power. Feminist pedagogy interrogates the power structures outside the walls of the classroom (Fisher, 2001). Feminist classrooms, being established on “co-education,” can make male students, who are used to being privileged in an “objective” and “rationally minded” class environment, resistant to the democratic classroom model. The reason for such resistance is that a “co-educational” classroom does not privilege their voices and confirm their worldviews, since by definition feminist classrooms center the lived experiences of women and the politics of gender oppression. As first-time Women’s Studies students, some participants in Alilunas’ study reported feeling “attacked” or “singled out” because of their identity and class discussions (Alilunas, 2011). This is a result of being exposed to course materials that address privilege. Consequently, male students express

resistance to course materials, verbal and bodily hostility, or dropping the class entirely (Alilunas, 2011).

Freire cites the necessity of “conscientizing” even the “oppressor,” or those who benefit from the products of social disadvantage (i.e. White people, men, heterosexual, cisgender, etc.). In Giroux’s (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Giroux writes about theorizing how student resistance is an extension of students’ asserting their own worldview. Asserting their worldview allowed students to remain complacent and comfortable in their knowledge, which is itself a manifestation of privilege (Kimmel, 1997). Giroux’s work also argues that resistance has no uniform manifestation, but that disengagement and resistance, operates on a spectrum. This can be through a multitude of acts such as texting, remaining silent and quietly disagreeing, to being outright confrontational to peers and others in classroom spaces. It can be difficult for individuals to accept themselves as the benefactors of a system that leaves others disadvantaged. Resistance can be exacerbated when cisgender men are the “token male” in the classroom; which can lead to a sense of isolation (Alilunas, 2011). That outside experience could be beneficial for men learning feminism, as Freire conceptualized resistance as “an assertion of students’ agency” (Freire 2000). Agency is grounded in a feminist notion of accountability rather than a vitriolic reaction of discomfort when exposed to ideologies that run counter to what one believes (Case, 2013). The danger lies in the context of that resistance, particularly *how* cisgendered men resist feminist materials and ideologies.

Drawing upon literature from scholars in the fields of feminist pedagogy, privilege studies, and writings on men’s place in feminism, this project explored how cisgender men experienced feminist courses and how and why their resistance to feminist course materials manifested in a range of acts of disengagement. Utilizing a Freirean framework of

“conscientization,” and “resistance,” particularly from the principles put forth in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this thesis project explored the process within acts of disengagement as an extension of privilege in the Gender and Women’s Studies classroom at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Through semi-structured interviews with cisgendered male students enrolled in women’s studies classes, this project critically examined students’ experiences qualitatively and proposed ways that privilege may be utilized in the progressive political project of “democratic,” pedagogical feminist praxis.

## **Procedures**

### *Participants*

In order to be interviewed for this research study, participants must have 1) identified as male, and 2) have been a student at Minnesota State University, Mankato currently be enrolled or had been enrolled in a course offered by the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies. The sample included 6 participants from introductory courses so as to offer differential experiences in data analysis from the interview questions constructed for this study. Of the participants, four were White, one was Asian, and one was Black. The age of participants ranged from eighteen to twenty three years old. The majors of students included Gender and Women’s Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Psychology, Mass Media, Law Enforcement, and Cognitive Science. The research was conducted via semistructured interviews at mutually agreed upon locations between the student investigator and the participants. These interviews took place after the recruitment process, and the details of the consent process, had been gone over thoroughly. Each interview took between one and one half hour, with a conclusion where the participants were able to ask questions of the researcher.

### *Recruiting*

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. I went into undergraduate Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) classrooms and spoke about the research study. In the presentation, I referenced the voluntary nature of participation to ensure privacy and security for potential participants. Following the presentation, interested participants were able to contact me via contact information I provided during the presentation. I would follow-up by sending an email to instructors of the classes I had presented in and they forwarded those to all students in the classes. GWS Department faculty members were also asked to distribute the flyer to their students through an email (Appendix 1) with information to contact me if they were interested in participating. If students expressed interest in participating in the project, all proper measures were taken to ensure student confidentiality. The researcher was unable to make it to all undergraduate classrooms; (Appendix 2) thus the flyer was posted in targeted areas of buildings where GWS courses convened to spark interest. Students who expressed interest initiated contact through email and a mutually agreed upon location on campus was chosen for the interviews to be conducted.

### *Interviewing*

I began the interviews by reading the consent form (Appendix 3) to each participant. They were then given time to read the consent form themselves and ask questions they might have. After all questions were answered to the participant's satisfaction, they signed the consent form. After signing and initialing the appropriate parts of the form, each participant provided their course information for data purposes and demographic information. I began recording via the electronic recording device and commenced the interview. Sample interview questions included, "For what reason did you decide to enroll in a Gender and Women's Studies class? At



any time during the semester have you felt like dropping the course? If so, why? Before enrolling in a Gender and Women's Studies class, how had you thought about your gender identity?"

Following the main sequence of questions participants were asked short post-interview survey questions for comparison with other participants. These survey questions explored some of the acts that the literature deemed as characteristic of defensive learning among students. This was done to explore the "spectrum" of resistance between the participants in data analysis.

Interviews lasted between one hour and one hour and a half. When an interview went over the hour mark, I asked the participant if they wished to continue the interview. Interviews that went beyond one hour did not exceed an hour and a half. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording device checked out from the institution's library. The files were then moved onto my password protected personal computer and backed up on my encrypted external hard drive for backup. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim using a Word processing program. Next, I removed or altered all identifying information from the transcripts. This included the removal or alteration of references to specific students, professors, locations and course materials that would identify the class the participant was enrolled in or the identity of the participants themselves. After all interview transcripts were prepared coding and analysis began.

### *Analysis*

Interviews were analyzed using a grounded approach similar to what Robert K. Pleasants used in his 2011 article titled, "Men Learning Feminism: Protecting Privileges through Discourses of Resistance." His approach to analyzing his interviews helped identify common themes in each participant's account. According to Pleasants,

[I] began to see men's resistance to feminism in terms of the discourse they used to criticize feminism and preserve their privileges as men...in spite of self-perceptions of

being receptive to feminist thoughts and their intentions to understand, learn from, and personally grown from feminism, participants simultaneously drew upon discourses to preserve their male privilege (Pleasants, 2011, p. 233)

The themes were identified through the process of transcription and upon subsequent readings of the transcripts. For instance, when transcribing the interviews and reviewed them, I highlighted and made notes in the margins when questions and comments related to classroom materials, reactions to privilege, identifications with feminism, and the contradiction of men's presence in Gender and Women's Studies classes were made. Later, after all the interviews were transcribed, I noticed the links between the comments in the margins to broader themes. For instance, I noticed that comments about class discussion, course materials, and class environment, were all related to a broader theme of the reactions of participants to feminist pedagogy. This process allowed me to identify four themes in the interviews. The four overarching themes that emerged in the interviews including accounts of participants' 1) affiliations/disaffiliations with feminism, 2) reactions to feminist pedagogy, 3) reacting to and understanding privilege, and 4) the intersection of men and feminism.

### **Reflexivity**

Firstly, I must recognize that my own personal identity as a cisgendered, heterosexual, white male renders me with certain aspects of patriarchal privilege in society. I was fascinated to study this topic partly because of my evolution of consciousness, caused by feminism. Like many White men, I grapple with the difficulties of navigating how to meaningfully contribute to social justice without colonizing or appropriating spaces. My own experiences in activism and academic work have shown the detriments to how imposing one's privilege at any level is harmful to those around me and takes away the transformative potential that feminism seeks to

embody. As an educator and a student I have been privileged to have an inside view of the impact that feminism has had on my worldview and getting to build meaningful coalition with women. These experiences have incentivized me with an unbridled desire to be accountable to and speak with other positionally privileged men about the benefits feminism and feminist learning.

### **Potential Limitations**

In this section I attempt to assess the potential limitations of this study. One limitation is that I was the only person coding the data. It is worth mentioning that others may have coded the data differently. I also had no formal experience as a research interviewer. Another potential limitation that I expected to encounter was that Mankato is a predominantly white institution, 76% of students, (PWI) which could correlate with having a racially homogenous (i.e. White) sample (College Portrait, n.d.). This would adversely impact the methodology and data collection during the research process.

It was also pertinent to note that I also occupied a position of authority in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies as a graduate teaching assistant. I was teaching GWS 110: Intro to Gender Studies. . It would have been unethical to have recruit students in the course that I was the instructor of record of because of the power differential. Because of this privileged status in the department in which students were situated to attain a grade, participants might have been hesitant to answer truthfully and fully. I explained that any identifying information such as names, references, places, or course content would be removed from the interview transcripts and would not appear in my thesis. I also attempted to alleviate concerns by ensuring them that should they change their mind, they could stop the interview at any time or they can contact me

post-interview and state that they don't wish to be a part of the study and I would subsequently delete and dispose of the digital and material transcripts of their interview.

I anticipated that my insider status as a white male might be beneficial to participants opening up to me; however this may also have been subverted by my status within the department and as a grad student and a researcher. I also anticipated that the interview space could easily become a space for male students to have vented and complain about their experiences with feminist teaching and learning; which I did my utmost to keep them on the topic of answering the interview questions. I anticipated that I may have had difficulty, while collecting and analyzing my data, with judging my participants for their perceived lack of acceptance of feminist thought that might have adversely affected the exploration of my thesis project. I anticipated concerns in data analysis as five to eight participants was not generalizable to a larger population, while studies with smaller sizes can often provide key insights into aspects of specific populations. This study provided important information on how male students learned, felt, and engaged the functioning of the feminist classroom.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings of my analysis of interviews I conducted with six male undergraduate students, either currently or previously enrolled in a Gender and Women's Studies course, at a state university in the upper Midwest. Here I discuss the issues and negotiations these male students face with regards to their identity, reaction to course materials, feminism, GWS, privilege, and finally the place of male students in feminism but more particularly in the GWS classrooms at public universities. As stated in Chapter 3, all names of people and places have been changed to protect the identities of the research participants. At the time of each interview, all participants were either part or full-time students doing their undergraduate studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Additionally, due to the limitations on the number population of male students being enrolled in Gender and Women's Studies classes at said institution, mentioned in previous chapters, some participants were not currently enrolled in a GWS class for the semester of this research study, but had been in the past. All participants were required to have taken at least one class offered as credit in the Gender and Women's Studies Department on campus.

The following chapter is divided into four overarching themes of 1) affiliations/disaffiliations with feminism, 2) reactions to feminist pedagogy, 3) reacting to and understanding privilege, and 4) the intersection of men and feminism.

### **Thematic Analysis**

#### *Theme One: Affiliations With Feminism*

Responses demonstrated that males take Gender and Women's Studies classes for a variety of different reasons, largely due to their ideas about feminism. Affiliation is the first overarching theme that emerged from the interviews. Here I discuss participants' preconceptions about feminism, reactions from peers, family, and friends for being in a GWS course, the popular

demonization of Feminism, and how each participant identifies after having taken a GWS course (as a feminist).

### *Preconceptions*

Participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of feminism before taking a Gender and Women's Studies course. Four of the six participants disclosed a lack of knowledge about feminism prior to taking a Gender and Women's Studies course. Students in my sample discussed their lack of knowledge when it came to feminist issues, what constituted feminism, and how their background shaped their knowledge about feminism. For reference, all interview questions can be found in Appendix 5, (page 110) of this thesis. For example, Logan, a senior, explains,

So I always, as you might've heard a few times, I sort of carried this negative connotation-the word 'feminist' and the feminist perspective. So I guess for me I sort of carried that advice as well-but-I guess I was more neutral toward it I mean it wasn't really all that aware or informed about feminism anyway but I guess it would be a little bit more of a negative take on my end, initially.

Tony, a senior, agrees, and explains in the following passage that for him he had also carried a negative opinion about feminism, and sought to take the course to broaden his perspective:

I never learned much about feminism I suppose. So I thought I would be able to learn a little bit about-from an actual course material-not just here's some people online who say 'I'm a feminist!' sort of thing. I thought I would go to a class and learn 'Ok, what is the philosophy here behind feminism to a certain extent and also...I'm going to use another example here sorry. But I thought it would be a good thing to know how different people,

particularly female, would respond to different sorts of treatment and perhaps what is a more appropriate way of interacting with females in general I suppose-that you don't know very well.

Tony, despite identifying any knowledge with feminism beforehand, thought it would be valuable to take the course because he wanted to be more informed. This sentiment showed up in other parts of the interviews as well. Tony could also be considered an outlier in this area as he disclosed having had several close female friends for the majority of his life. This factor, and the fact that he came in with a supposedly open mind could have made him more receptive to feminist perspectives in the classroom.

Similar to Tony's sentiment about "broadening his perspective," as it were, Mark similarly utilized the exact same phrase when talking about misconceptions of men taking Gender and Women's Studies courses, specifically how it is expected that the class is a ruse for heterosexual men to meet with and fraternize with women in the class. He expands,

Yup, it's all just to like meet a girl and then get her number, take her out, and then move onto the next one in class. That's like the assumption people make about Gender and Women's Studies courses.

Mark, a senior, brought up the interesting point that even in a feminist space, from an outside perspective such as among peers heterosexuality is imposed onto even the realm of curiosity with GWS. But because it's a course that contains feminist perspectives, Mark's peers, and many others perhaps, would more than likely feel the need to cosign his heterosexual intentions, though unfounded, in order to preserve themselves from peer policing and to maintain compulsory heterosexuality. Mark's usage of "broadened perspective" is fascinating too, since

he became a Gender and Women's Studies major thereafter and took several more Gender and Women's Studies courses after his first.

Francis, a freshman, disclosed a similar lack of understanding about feminism, although he himself did not identify as having a negative opinion about feminism, merely a lack of knowledge. He explains,

I think before I took any of the courses I didn't think much about feminism. Like I didn't disagree with necessarily but I just didn't know much about it. Like I wasn't very involved but like-I started taking class after class-and other classes that aren't Gender and Women's Studies but are like very connected with like-over the last year and half I've had like-it's been double Gender and Women's Studies classes because I've taken a class that had a lot of material that is very similar to it so it's just been coming in.

Francis raised another issue, which is that similar to the participants interviewed he went on to take more Gender and Women's Studies classes after his first course. It also is worth mentioning that Francis, while not disagreeing with feminism, might have been more open to learning about the systemic inequalities brought to light around gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc. since he is a person of color. His own lived experience of intersecting identities as a cisgender, man of color could have played a part in his willingness to take in and grapple with feminist perspectives and theory.

I did expect for there to be a positive correlation between the completion of a Gender and Women's Studies course and openness to feminist perspectives and further involvement in GWS the majority of the participants, five of the six, specifically went on to either take more GWS classes or to bring things that they learned from their GWS classes into practice in their own lives, which is discussed later in this chapter. As these findings suggest, completion of a Gender



and Women's Studies course is very positively correlated with males unlearning several of the myths of feminism, and oftentimes changing their minds about how they had conceptualized or envisioned what feminism was, and in seeing the importance discussing feminist issues; which is consistent with the findings of other research (Case, 2007; Chang & Hays, 2003; Stake, 2006; Basu & Reinitz & Thomsen, 1995).

*Backlash from Peers, Family and Friends*

Participants were asked to reflect on the reactions of their peers, family, and friends as a result of taking a Gender and Women's Studies course. Two of the participants indicated some sort of backlash or questioning of their choice to take a GWS class on the part of their peers, family, and/or friends. Mark expanded on questioning from one family member,

Yeah, like one family member of mine I told them I was going to minor in Gender and Women's Studies they were just like 'oh, you just wanna get in touch with your feminine side' and I just kinda pick and choose my battles. I wasn't about to get into that but I basically just said 'that's not really what's it's about' and it's-there's more importance to it than just-that's not the reason I'm into it.

Mark was actually the only one himself to experience a form of questioning on the part of his family. Mark also seemed willing to tell those around him, including his peers mentioned earlier in this chapter, of his decision to take a GWS course. Other participants experienced backlash or questioning, even vicariously, as Mickey did. Mickey's sister is pursuing a degree in Gender and Women's Studies at another proximal institution similar to the one he is enrolled in, and elaborates on said backlash against GWS:

My dad's side they're very heteronormative. My parents don't really approve of my trans sister. They will dead-name and use the wrong pronouns and it's really starting to bother

me. She doesn't live at home-she doesn't like coming home. But she's taking a bunch of Gender and Women's Studies courses, and loving it, and she's going to major in that almost for sure and my parents are like "Ok, well there's no-there's no future in that. There's no jobs in that, what are you going to do? How are you going to pay for your education?"

Mickey, a freshman, didn't directly experience this backlash himself from his family, but he witnessed it since his sister was majoring in GWS. Mickey also had a clever form of resistance to questioning from his more normative peers, by appearing to take mostly Intro courses, as he states:

Well, for those that weren't really in the know I kind of played it off as 'Oh, I'm kind of taking a bunch of Intro courses and it filled a requirement so why not?' For the ones that do know I don't think they thought anything of it-it's just-because they also know it's an Intro to course it's-it fulfills a goal or requirement and I'm not taking any higher level of it. An Intro course is just pretty innocent in itself. If I was taking a bunch of courses in Gender and Women's Studies they would probably be like 'Dude, what are you doing?' Then they would probably start to question me on it but like for the most part they would probably have left it alone.

This sort of resistance to peers seems to be an effective strategy, since Mickey seems well-versed in the kinds of attacks and questioning that his sister goes through as a GWS major. This gives insight into the depths that many students go to, even when their closer peers approve or not, to avoid even the tiniest bit of scrutiny.

Backlash and questioning of those that enroll in Gender and Women's Studies courses can be a common reason for male students to not wish to venture into the feminist classroom.

Having their identities called into question, learning about privilege (which is touched on later in this chapter), and facing persecution from their peers are all likely detractors for other male students.

### *The Popular Demonization of Feminism*

All interview participants were asked to clarify what the popular, or their previous ideas of feminism and feminists, had been. All six participants gave the consensus that they had seen feminism portrayed negatively. For instance, many shared similar popular myths about feminism and about those that identify as feminists. Silas, a freshman, gives voice to a few of these myths that he was familiar with:

Feminism is portrayed in a few different ways. The more dominant one with-is-that like women are only using like-ugly women use feminism to get their like fifteen minutes of fame kind of a thing. Like it's only for like...the angry women are the ones that you know...don't have a man it's just it's all about...the view is just that like it's only like the crazy women that are feminists.

Silas demonstrated what many feminist scholars have argued before, the rise of anti-feminism as a part of both conservative backlash and postfeminist ideologies (Case, 2013; Cataldi, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). Silas is also critical at the same time of these. I expect that it is common, given the consistency of this awareness of negativity towards feminism, for male students to be aware of these perceptions of feminism before ever even viewing GWS courses in the registration catalog.

Navigating the contradictions that one learns about in GWS courses, how the world sees feminism versus how it actually is, seemed to be something students with more conservative

family members, peers, and/or friends seemed to have trouble with. Tony shared about how his stepfather responded negatively to his taking a GWS course:

My stepdad rolled his eyes right away. That was more along the lines of his beliefs in feminism, of they don't actually want equality sort of thing. A very sort of cynical point of view, perhaps. Though I wouldn't be surprised it was based off of his actual experiences. I'm sure that he doesn't have too many interactions with very culturally active people that weren't-that stuck to the correct sort of equal equality, feminism idea. So, yeah, no he rolled his eyes immediately because he was like "I can't believe you actually need to do this or anything."

Mickey also shared an experience of a friend of his sharing his discomfort with feminism, and how it bothered him that it focused so much on women:

He just thought that like feminism as a concept was stupid and he wanted to call it like 'Equalism' because-because he thought a feminist was somebody that thinks that uh women are better than men-and I think he used the word 'Femi-Nazi' a couple of things but I tried to show him that like it's feminist because it's bringing up the oppressed group and-it sort of went on like that and I gave him a few examples of that with like racism and other great -isms.

Mickey and Silas, both freshmen, had more personal backlash from their support networks around misinformation around what feminism is, and it frustrated them given what they had learned. I expected some consistencies in the common stereotypes; such as the "Femi-Nazi" or the "Bra-Burning Butch Lesbian." There was a consistency with how these male students thought feminism and feminists were seen by their peers and in the media (Cataldi, 1995; Fisher, 2001; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997; Pleasants, 2011).

As it relates to the media, Logan expressed his own past trepidations with identifying as a feminist early on:

Yeah, for me, you know, the way that it was just presented in media, and that way that my friends and family spoke about it was just in very negative terms-like that sort of man-hating individual or woman specifically. Someone who's very vocal and almost violent in the way that they protest or fight for-or approach or just-progress social issues. Yeah, just a lot of violence and-at least verbal-at least being verbally aggressive, not like physically violent. It's just very controversial, very off putting.

The dominant ideology of the militant feminist could be off-putting when it comes to any group that is deemed radical within patriarchal hegemony. The image of "man-hating lesbian" and other stereotypes was also shared by Francis, a freshman, who mentioned how men view feminists:

The vision they'll have of her will be of like a crazy woman with probably in like her thirties or forties with shorter hair. She's supposedly a lesbian, she hates men. She just thinks everything doesn't come to her easily and she should have more rights. I mean...I don't even know. Guys, they come up with the craziest visions and stereotypes for this-yeah like-or they'll call her a bunch of names like 'butch' or whatever.

Francis and Logan's, a freshman and a senior respectively, transcripts reveal the popular myth that feminists want to dominate men, that they wish to invert the power dynamic of patriarchy and make men subservient to them (Case, 2013; Cataldi, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). These visions of the angry feminist, and the other stereotypes mentioned, are a means to discredit and push back on equality. It is also directly related to maintaining the privilege the men that don't enroll in feminist classes. By saying that they don't involve themselves in deviant feminist activities or

classes, men outside of feminist discussions reify their privileged identities without having to be accountable to those in the ranks of feminism or to their male peers who are open to changing.

*Identification with Feminism*

Despite the various backlash, questioning, and popular media demonization of feminism and feminists, each participant, when asked about if they identified as a feminist, five of the six interviewees explicitly identified themselves as a feminist. Below are included the specific instances, from the transcripts, in which the participants self-identify as feminists.

Silas, a freshman, states:

Well I now consider myself a liberal feminist. So, if that helps...but um I definitely see it as a more positive thing. I understand like the true intention...intentions of feminism and I understand there are different forms of feminism. There's different...levels or variants of feminism based on like views that people might have but I definitely see feminism as a necessary thing.

Mickey, a freshman, states:

Yes, I myself identify as a feminist. That's the first time I've had to say that.

Tony, a senior, states:

I like it now. I-I would've been more cautious about it beforehand of-not fully knowing exactly what feminism is and-or the different schools of thought on it, for instance-now I consider myself a feminist and I like the idea.

Logan, a senior, states:

Well first and foremost I would more than-I would identify as a feminist, for sure-so that's probably been the furthest shift.

Mark, a senior, states:

So then I was like “You know what I am a feminist.” So, like, I started that could be another identity of mine is being a feminist rather than like cuz it’s just it was a way of me internalizing more and realizing that this is what I believe in and this is-it makes sense that this is a part of who I am.

Francis did not explicitly name himself as a feminist but stated that he identified with feminist activism and issues being of import to him and to society at large:

I think I’m a lot more understood in it now-like I get a lot more concepts in terms of privilege and in terms of gender equality than when I did-say-four or five years ago probably.

So while Francis didn’t necessarily identify himself as a feminist, he still saw the need for feminist goals. Just because someone doesn’t self-identify as a feminist in front of a researcher doesn’t make them any less of an ally for the cause. Francis, over the course of the interview, shared nuanced opinions and understandings of feminist issues that he deemed unfair, as did most of the rest of the interviewees.

This overarching theme of affiliations with feminism demonstrates the nuanced relationship male students navigate before taking Gender and Women’s Studies courses. The possibility of males being deterred from participation either in the class, or from even enrolling in GWS, seems to be quite high given the frequency of how feminism is demonized. One’s peers may also police, question, or tease male students who are involved in GWS courses. For male students, going in with preconceptions, it might take lived experience to go into a GWS classroom if one has no prior knowledge or familiarity with feminism. But, the enlightening correlation of this section shows that male students, coming in with false preconceptions of feminism and feminist perspectives, can learn throughout taking the Gender and Women’s

Studies courses that there is a place for them to participate, so long as they are willing to maintain an open mind when entering that space. There is also a possibility that male students could walk out of the classroom identifying as feminists.

### *Theme Two: Reactions to Feminist Pedagogy*

The second major theme that emerged from the interviews was how male students reacted to feminist pedagogy. This encompasses: 1) their reaction to course discussion, 2) their reaction to course materials, and 3) their reaction to the class environment. Participants felt that oftentimes they were more noticeable being a minority as male students in a predominantly female classroom. This also effected how male students saw men portrayed, as evidenced when male students witnessed their male peers get policed by other classmates, as Francis, Mark, and Silas state, or feared that they might say something else. Participants Mark, Silas, Francis, and Tony (Mark and Tony are seniors, Francis and Silas are freshmen) also express both comfort and discomfort in the feminist classroom.

### *Classroom Discussion*

*Like last semester I had talked to one. He had made an uncomfortable conversational piece, and um the class kind of attacked him for it and it was...it was a little rough to watch because he didn't completely understand what he was saying. And so afterwards I like talked to him and I was like 'Hey this was why that kinda happened. It's ok; don't worry about it we're all here to learn.' But like it was just really uncomfortable...because he had at least like twenty people like-what he said-they were like attacking what he said not him.*

Active participation in classroom discussion is an important aspect of a democratic classroom (Carillo, 2007; Case, 2013; Fisher, 2001; Freire, 1970; Allen & Walker & Webb,



2002). As Silas's quote indicates, there are often cases that can deter male students from wanting to speak up or feel vulnerable to attack. This fear of doing something wrong is consistent when students are a representative minority in classroom spaces (Alilunas, 2011; Pleasants, 2011). The difference here is that privilege also plays an important aspect with when, how, or what male students are able to determine what is comfortable or capable of sharing. For instance, male students might prefer sitting in silence and avoid speaking in class for fear that their privileged status would be called attention to and their statements discredit. They might fear that they would have to "defend" their personhood in some way (Case, 2013; Flood, 2011; Kimmel, 1997).

Other interviewees had similar cases in which male students were "ripped apart" by their classmates for saying something offensive. The feelings of anxiety over saying anything that might be taken "out of context" was consistent, yet most of the participants claimed being open and responsive to the structure of feminist classroom dialogues. The litmus test is if male students are capable of learning from these uncomfortable moments. Ironically, this is a phenomenon that women students, LGBT, and students of color have to face every day in some classes (Center for American Progress, 2015; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2008; Gutiérrez, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Sue, 2010). Are feminist courses capable of meeting male students where they're at? Are they able to give them opportunities to learn and not be discouraged from participating? Francis shared a similar story, about a classmate who had been corrected by a classmate:

One of the other male students in the class he had something that was-he disagreed a bit but he-the general concept he agreed with it but then-a female student put her hand up and she said 'Not to discredit you,' but then proceeded to tear him a new asshole on that subject so...it was either about the concept of strip clubs or porn or something like that

and [the professor] said-she was talking about how most if not all women in this line of employment are probably coerced into it. And he put his hand up and I think he said something about-well he agreed that a good amount of women in those industries are probably being coerced but there was also probably a percentage that aren't being coerced or are doing it of their free will. And the other student who put her hand up-I mean she basically just said no to everything he said. Like nothing he said was true or something of that manner.

Maintaining a civil space is an important principle to adhere to in a feminist classroom, particularly for instructors. One might ask, am I giving enough space to each student? Am I letting my own political leanings get in the way of who I let talk? Or am I giving too many positive cues to students who seem to be more feminist than students who do not? A balance seems to be key and not all stories boil down to the binary of wrong/right. Each educator should be able to determine this balance through reflexive analysis of their own classroom and actions.

The above quote shows that Francis seems to think it was unfair that his colleague was “torn a new asshole.” A consistent tactic of male students in this study regarded listening to what other people were saying to feel more comfortable in the classroom space. This was a way to avoid the policing phenomenon and to take in more perspectives. Silas, a freshman, mentions his own discomfort for the first time while in his GWS course:

It was a little tough wanting to, like, say my opinion or, like, even to talk in the class for the first bit. Um, I actually ended up talking to [the professor] about it like because I felt uncomfortable and because I did want to share a lot I wanted to engage and learn but I felt weird about it it just felt like uncomfortable. Through talking to her it made it a lot easier. Um...but yeah it took a while it took until probably about halfway through the

class that I was actually fully comfortable, didn't think about it and was like fine sharing my opinion and stuff.

There seems to be an adjustment period for Silas, as there might be for other male students, who are unfamiliar with a class structured like a GWS classroom. Francis, a freshman, also mentions that he had a peer that felt a sense of discomfort in the classroom sometimes:

One of my friends, who I always sat by in the class, he's a guy too and we would always be talking about that and he would be like "you know I don't always feel great when [the professor] says stuff like that" and I could see his point of view but I can also understand from what [the professor's] saying the language [the professor] has to use because what [the professor's] saying is true.

Francis is able to contextualize the feminist point of view to his friend's discomfort with the material. This is not always achievable when students are confronted with course materials that can be seen as vilifying their gender, or some other aspect of their identity (Case, 2013; Fisher, 2001; Kimmel, 1997). Since males usually occupy a smaller gender ratio in their class, their hypervisibility could play a role in what Silas describes as discomfort (Alilunas, 2011). Taking time to be comfortable or uncomfortable in that space is consistent with other research in the area (Giroux, 1983; Moore, 1998; Orr, 1993; Richardson & Robinson, 1994), as well as listening to gain more information before speaking.

With classroom disengagement, five of the participants agreed that the classroom discussion format was agreeable to their preferred learning style, with the exception of Tony, a senior. Tony disliked small group discussions but enjoyed larger class discussions:

Small group discussions have never been my forte so no. But the class discussions where the teacher would ask 'Ok does anybody have any response to this presentation slide?' Or

whatever it was that we were going over in class. So it was definitely good in larger class discussions for me to hear what other people had to say.

I consider Tony's disapproval with small group discussions a personal preference. Not every student can be expected to get everything out of every method and form of feminist classrooms. What makes feminist classrooms different from "normal classrooms" is that they are structured on the basis of small group and larger class discussions, where the professor does not "give" knowledge to students, but instead they create produce knowledge together as a collective. Students are encouraged to use their own lived experience as a political grounding to theorize about patriarchal culture.

The rest of the interviewees were very positive about class discussions, as it allowed for a rich dialogue to emerge. As Mickey, a freshman puts it:

I actually like coming to class, because it's a lot of open discussion. It's not a very stressful course for me because I know a lot of the concepts already-but I do like the open discussion and-you just talk-it's a very friendly environment. I don't get in some classes. Yeah. I've always liked that a little more. Especially on topics-when you're talking about yourself, you're not trying to talk about some abstract eighteenth century literature thing, you're talking about 'Hey this is me and my experiences,' and it's a lot easier to talk about yourself than eighteenth century literature things.

Mickey seems to enjoy speaking from his own personal standpoint, which goes against more "traditional" academic forms of learning and classroom environments (Allen & Walker & Webb, 2002; Fisher, 2001; Freire, 1970). Mark, a senior, agreed that the classroom discussions were unlike anything in his major:

But usually, there isn't as much discussion in those [*other classes*] as there is. So the opportunities aren't as plenty. But for the most part I kind of just like to sit back and observe the other people's opinions. That's a big part of why I enjoy the classes is the discussions. And I feel that by having other students offer up their experiences and their own opinions based on the subject matter because so much of Gender and Women's Studies is analyzing just how everybody is interacting with their various backgrounds and the intersections of different people so I really enjoy the discussion aspect that is in Gender and Women's Studies more than any other subject field I've taken classes for.

There seems to be a complicated relationship with male students, often as minorities in the classroom space of GWS courses, to feminist pedagogy. There seems to be a positive reception to the style of discussion formats in the style of GWS courses, despite the disconnect many male students may experience being entirely comfortable sharing or asking questions.

### *Course Materials*

Participants were specifically asked about their thoughts on course materials, especially if they felt that men were portrayed negatively, and for what reasons. Of the interviewees, all of them gave a wide variety of answers. Francis, a freshman, explains:

That's probably why there's so much backlash against feminism because a lot of men probably can't take that other men do this [intimate partner violence] and they feel like they're being attacked personally which is not the case at all. Jackson Katz was talking about this about how a lot of men feel threatened and that's when they band together to fight against women like they're doing something that's wrong like they're not saying something that's true.

Francis ties the portrayal of men in course materials back to how anti-feminism, and anti-social justice initiatives, are demonized by the mainstream to maintain the status quo of heterosexual, cisgender, White systems of privilege. Francis was not the only one able to link men's actions to the systemic aspects of oppression and privilege. Two other interviewees were able to link the portrayal of men to the system of gender, or at least felt they were balanced. Seeing the contradictions of masculinity as a symptom of gender, rather than as an attack on individual males, seemed to allow male students to take on an expansive outlook. When prompted to reflect on if men were portrayed negatively as part of GWS course materials, Mark shared:

Um, I don't-I never feel like men itself is what's being criticized I always just feel like it's the construction that is implied by what a man should be is what's criticized. Like, does that make any sense? Yeah, so it's like, I never felt like 'I'm a man I'm being attacked.' It was always-or being criticized-it was just feeling more like what society is telling men should be is what's criticized. Like, it should be more open, not like one specific type of man.

Logan elaborates:

No actually. When I first went into those courses I thought they might've, but-in actually taking the course, I wouldn't say so. I think there's equal treatment of all identities and like you know there's as much as you can possibly be objective discussion of all things relevant, I don't feel like men are portrayed any more or less negative.

### *Class Environment*

There were a variety of responses to this prompt of whether course materials in GWS were portraying men negatively, but my question was designed to tap into sentiments of if they felt that their privilege was under attack. All six participants responded that they, at one point or

another, disagreed with or felt uncomfortable due to something someone had said in the classroom of their GWS course. All reported that none of them would show signs or entertain notions of resistance to those that were involved in the discourse. Many classrooms surely make all students feel uncomfortable at one point or another, especially in a class like a Gender and Women's Studies course, where feminist issues and awareness can take a very real toll on some students (Fisher, 2001; hooks, 1994; hooks 2003).

When responding to the class environment facilitated by feminist teachers in Gender and Women's Studies, all six participants spoke well of their instructors handling of civil disagreements and discussions. Logan, a senior, spoke highly of the classroom environment of his GWS course:

Well, in the cases that it's happened to me, where I've encountered that, it was handled very well at least. You know, there's this environment wherein you feel safe to disagree and so I felt like if we did have a disagreement it wouldn't make me not want to come to class, it would make me want to come to class and sort of work that out. That's always reinforced.

The "safe to disagree" aspect of Logan's quote has parallels to other male students feeling comfortable in the classroom space, as Mickey states:

"Yeah I feel like I contribute. But like as said I don't contribute when it's like about women and gender violence and stuff like that because it's for the women speak out. So I've kind of kept my head down the last couple of classes because it's mostly been violence against women-stuff like that."

Feeling as if one can contribute has a positive correlation with not seeing men as being "attacked" by course materials, or by the classroom, their classmates, or instructors. Logan and

Francis went out of their way to compliment how their teachers held the space during difficult discussions and materials:

Logan: So yeah I think with both professors really did a good job with being-helping us as students to understand that what we see is what we see but there are these things going on, as you explained, that are resulting in why we see men as being perpetrators versus as victims. But that's not because men are inherently perpetrators but-they've been socialized in certain ways-that women have been socialized in certain ways, etc. etc.

Francis: And I thought that they were both extremely smart. So I don't think I'd be able to just ditch the class so to speak. Just for a disagreement, I'd definitely have to come back. Not just to hear about why I would disagree with them-or why they'd disagree with me-but they'd probably have pretty good views on all the content which we hadn't learned about yet-which I might probably agree with them-or disagree with them on, whatever.

Giving praise to teachers suggests that the professors were welcoming a plurality of perspectives, even from male students who could disagree. The importance of empowering male students to feel included seems to lie in facilitation of a mindful space where all perspectives are valued and disagreement does not make one feel targeted by the class. Tony, a senior, brings up an intriguing point of how he would like to be seen in class:

I actually would prefer to have been seen as ignorant and not attacked. I didn't want to say something that would stir the rest of the class's feelings of righteous anger in my direction.



The need to retreat, or to blend in or disappear, or to be seen as ignorant removes a student from having to face the contradictions inherent in being a male student in a predominantly female space. Mark, a senior, also deployed a tactic to make himself less visible to those in his course:

I retreated into like a wall seat into the corner. I just tried to like stay out of the way and everything and started off as like an observer because it's like I don't wanna appear that I'm in here for like an odd reason or whatever. So then like once I got an idea I was like a lot more comfortable and then I feel like I fit in now with every other group even though I'm the only guy or there's one other guy.

Mark touches on how privilege, visibility, and listening intersect as a strategy of becoming comfortable and “fitting in” in the classroom space. But Mark, like other interviewees, got more comfortable over the course of the semester, despite his minority status. Whether this is specifically due to the class discussions, course materials, the classroom environment, or all three by the end of the semester, Mark felt:

Yeah, like we would get into a discussion as a whole class and everyone would get like- we'd be in like a huge circle so that everyone would have like an equal say-like didn't look like anyone was more prominent than any other. Or when we would do a group project or something like then it's like I should contribute and I have to contribute and like people appeared to be accepting of what I said or building off of a point that I made. So then it was just like I just feel like I fit in. Like I shouldn't feel like I'm excluded at all.

Mark touches on important relations to how feminist pedagogy can bridge the gap of male student discomfort in Gender and Women's Studies courses. In this instance, Mark specifically cites how he feels more comfortable in the class environment because of the structure of the class

discussion and how he feels empowered to contribute as an individual, an aspect which is crucial for student success in GWS courses (Fisher, 2001; Freire, 1970). What correlation remains to be seen is how much discomfort has to do with privilege, specifically how aspects of feminist pedagogy allow students to feel more confident with participation, and how male students react and may change over time. A more longitudinal qualitative study that centers on feminist pedagogy and student engagement could address this. But for the sake of this study, the small sample of male students interviewed as a part of this institution seemed to react positively to their time in Gender and Women's Studies courses to where they felt comfortable contributing to discussions.

### *Theme Three: Reacting to and Understanding Privilege*

The third major theme that emerged from the interviews centered on how the participants felt about and became aware of privilege, understandings of privilege inside and outside of the classroom, and finally the deployment of privilege. Most participants: Mark, Tony, Mickey, and Silas (the first two seniors, the latter two freshmen), the White students, felt some level of discomfort with learning about privilege once they became aware of the concept. They also express uncertainty about what to do with their privilege inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and as a part of their daily lives after they complete their Gender and Women's Studies courses.

### *Awareness of Privilege*

Race was a factor in this study that seemed to make the participants more likely to be familiar with the experience of feeling like a minority in class, as well as being more open to the concept of privilege. Of the six participants, two of them were students of color. Logan and Francis identify as Asian and Black, respectively. Their reaction to the question about how

privilege was taught/learned about in class adds an additional layer of complexity when race is factored in. For instance, Francis, a freshman, brings up the point of his intersecting identities coming to his attention as part of the classroom space specifically:

Well yeah there were probably times like that because there were some units that we talked about why it's even as hard as it is being a woman it's even harder to be a woman of color whether you're Latina or Black or anything else. And I definitely felt like a minority because I am a minority and-in two ways like I was Black and I'm also a guy in that class which is eighty percent women. So I mean I definitely did feel like that but it wasn't a bad thing because it's true. What are you going to do about it? I'm a minority. It just comes with the territory I guess but it wasn't like the units were talking about-it wasn't like that stuff was uncomfortable it's just life.

Francis mentions an awareness of his intersectional identities, of being a cisgender, heterosexual, Black man, with the additional minority status of being a male student, came up in the classroom. It could be that his racial identity or his lived experiences as a Black man made him more comfortable with being a minority, and that this awareness carried over into receptiveness to the experience of male privilege. Logan, a senior, also commented on how he experienced male privilege:

Just one thing that came to mind. Being like a person of color I think that sort of feeds into like this distancing of a person of color who's male from-like GWS courses. I guess, culturally speaking, it was never really something that, or I guess especially for me I felt like it was something that I was really far-removed from because I wasn't really aware or that wasn't really anything that was appropriate to talk about, I guess. And I feel like that may or may not be more of a barrier when you're compounding being male and a person

of color. I was sort of thinking about that. And so bringing it, like I said, back to this conversation specifically I felt like, when I'm thinking about me as a male in GWS courses I'm also thinking about the fact that I have this other part of me too that's sort of- was an additional barrier for me to sort of gain interested or be exposed to this sort of content, and so I think it would be important to like consider that at least, as well.

Logan is a self-identified as a gay cisgender Asian man and adds an important that Gender and Women's Studies courses could be intimidating because course content gives voice to issues and identity around race. This could be that, as men of color benefit from male privilege yet don't from racial privilege, they may not wish to grapple with their privilege over women of color, as it would challenge their status. Logan deemed this as a "barrier" which could be the subject of future research, not just on how men of color navigate and understand the concept of privilege, but how this coincides with their own positional standpoint in society and if the structure of feminist classrooms aids or deters from this.

Race was significant in the interviews conducted for this study, as Francis indicated a more positive experience and familiarity with it in his courses, while Logan indicated that it might have served as a barrier for him initially, and may for other minority students. The White participants, four of the six, seemed to have very different responses to privilege too. Two of the interviewees, Silas and Mickey, each of them freshmen, had prior knowledge of feminist perspectives and were more aware of and open to understanding their privilege. Both Silas and Mickey were able to give examples of their privilege, for example, Mickey shares:

Well it's, how do I put this? I am the most privileged person alive for the most part. And so I can now see oppression against people because I was-I was very sheltered, for one and now I can see sexism happening and I can see people discriminating against trans

people and [his sister] tells me about all of these things that are happening. And occasionally I will see them, and I'll see these microaggressions. It's all these little things that I never noticed before that I now can see pretty clearly now that I look for them.

Furthermore, Silas stated:

So like I knew a lot of that stuff. I also knew a lot about like pronouns and gender differences as well as like the gender spectrum and like-like-difference between like sex and gender. So I knew a lot of that stuff going in. Um, I didn't completely understand privilege. One thing that they had tried to explain to me that I would like didn't quite understand before I took a class-I do now-was cultural appropriation.

Silas also mentions that he got a better understanding of privilege over the semester, and in his subsequent GWS courses, while Mickey had a much more explicit owning of his own privilege as a cisgender white bi-sexual man. Mickey also mentioned that his sibling was a Gender and Women's Studies major, and that they shared discussions about these issues, and that his peer group was largely made up of LGBT individuals. These factors seem to make him much more open to being unfairly advantaged by society, as White privilege postulates (Case, 2007; Case, 2013; Pleasants, 2011).

For those that had no prior knowledge, Mark or Tony, their answers had similarities about having difficulty accepting the fact that they had privilege. The societal advantage being brought to their attention seemed to run counter with that they had thought about the world before their GWS courses. As Mark, a senior, indicates:

Since I said before, Global Perspectives was my first foray into it that um, like there would occasionally be subjects where it's like-cuz it's my first idea getting a grasp of it-talking about privilege and I was like-at first it was hard for me to like grasp over it. But

then, one of our readings, it just like really made sense. It was like ‘the Invisible Knapsack’ or ‘Unpacking Privilege.’ It’s like, you know, after reading this yeah this definitely applies these different characteristics and I was like ‘I feel bad. I should’ - I mean I can feel bad.

Mark’s feelings of guilt are consistent with other researchers have found with privileged students learning about it for the first time as part of these courses. Despite this, Mark goes on to say that he learned of the potential to use his privilege for the benefit of others, or to “invest it,” as other researchers would say (Case, 2013):

When privilege was first brought up I got the impression I first got was just that people were saying that it’s something that I didn’t deserve. Which in a way is true, it’s just that the way I was so I was just trying to-that instead of using my privilege to help other people I was more trying to find ways that I didn’t have privilege. Trying to prove that I don’t even though I clearly do. So it just, that hurdle to get over, and then realize it’s all right that I have it so long as I can use it to help other people and then help make the world more equal I guess.

While Mark was resistant to the idea of privilege at first, throughout the course of his first class it appears like he was able to contextualize his privilege as part of a tool for the social equality of others. Tony, a senior, also shares his lack of prior knowledge of privilege before taking his course:

Whenever that concept came up, it came up plenty within the household with my stepdad, and he was always saying how ‘Oh, it’s crap. And, ‘So it’s not true, it’s not real because of this, that, and the other thing.’ I would say that I was not as aware before taking that class.

Tony's upbringing had a more direct anti-feminist perspective than other participants, which complicated his understanding of privilege. His perspective change and identification with feminist goals can't be attributed to feminist pedagogy based off of an interview alone. It could be that Tony learned that the counter-arguments to feminism had allowed for him to distance himself from the misinformation and demonization of feminism.

All study participants reported to have learned and understood much more about privilege over the course of their semester, or semesters, in taking Gender and Women's Studies core classes. Each participant provided an example, from the class or that they had become aware of outside of it that showed the inequalities around gender, race, and/or sexuality and other identity factors. Francis brought up the "wage gap," as well as how male voices are taken more seriously than female voices when speaking about social issues. Mickey referred to examples of violence and discrimination against trans\* people, and the ability of men to run for office much more easily and with less bias than men, also how comprehensive (safe sex) education should be mandatory for all states to teach. Tony brought up the issue of sexual harassment and how men "get away with more" as a consequence of how they are raised and socialized. Silas mentioned the male privilege of being able to walk alone at night without being bothered. Logan brought up the skewed dynamics of men and women in the workplace, specifically in the professional and academic realm. Finally, Mark made known the gender issues present in sports and the expectations of men culturally.

I found a positive correlation with learning about privilege as a course requirement of GWS courses, especially when it comes to privilege awareness among the participants of this study. The next part of this theme discusses how interviewees responded to privilege as a part of

the classroom space, as part of course materials, and as a part of their lives outside of the classroom space.

### *Inside/Outside Classroom Understandings of Privilege*

Participants were asked if what their perspective on privilege as a central part of Gender and Women's Studies course criteria. All six participants indicated that they thought that it should be included as part of the course materials, and would be beneficial for all students to learn about it as a concept either within a feminist classroom or in other areas of university life. Silas felt that it was important, stating:

Very much so. Like there's so many things that I don't even have to think about just because I am male. Like there's so many things that I can do without having to think about it. Um, whereas like women or transgender people like they have to constantly question and guess and be scared and like take these precautions. So yeah there's a lot of benefits or perks to being a male.

Silas goes on to indicate that the class helped him be able to unpack the "perks" of being a male. The fear of being outed, of being attacked or the hyper-awareness mentioned in having privilege could be seen as either a barrier or a benefit, which coincides with what other research has found (Alilunas, 2011; Flood, 2011).

The nature of learning about privilege as part of a Gender and Women's Studies class, particularly for the first time, can be difficult for male students given the fact that the gender composition of classes is often skewed more females to males. This "minority" or "hypervisible" status of male students can make the space intimidating for one to come to terms with the fact



that they have privilege, what to do with it, or to put their experiences of it into terms of understanding it. Complicating this is the maintenance of feminist pedagogical principles, such as the co-production of knowledge. While it's not the job of the feminist educator to coddle male student success and understanding of course concepts, these contradictions of educating those with often oppositional worldviews can be a very tricky balance for both educators and students in maintaining the "judge free zone."

Tony, a senior, was insecure about his presence in the classroom, as he didn't want to be seen as "one of those guys" that is in the class for "weird" reasons:

I was fearful that other people would be afraid of me. That is a strange sort of-I think too much-thing that I have carried with me for a while now. I am not afraid of other people nearly as bad as I am afraid that other people are going to be afraid of me. So it's sort of an indirect-I get in my head and so the perspectives of other people so I may be suspicious that other people might be intimidated by what I have to say or my presence.

Tony's fear may be unfounded, but there is something to be said for making others comfortable. Tony's statement of fear coincides with other participant's initial fears of judgment by their peers. On the flip side, there is also a gendered aspect to how privilege is taught and received by students, both male and female, when it is taught. As Francis, a freshman, states:

I think unfortunately when a lot of it's a lot of times a female professor teaching about it-which it should be in a subject like this I think-but I feel like some of the male students would kind of zone out. They would make her lose credibility in their own minds because a lot of male students-or men in general-when they hear a woman talking about male privilege, feminism, and inequality they're like 'oh, just another crazy feminist yelling' or being angry against or whatever. So I mean, I think that it's definitely the right-it

should be a female professor teaching these things in most settings I think but unfortunately there are probably a lot of individuals that would discredit her for no reason based on just the stereotype, basically.

The myths of feminism, particularly anti-feminist sentiments, can be embodied in students' reception to female professors teaching about privilege. This seems to be a manifestation of privilege, and backlash against feminism provides the distance necessary to discredit the fact that educators can serve as conduits for feminist perspectives in the classroom. However, this is only a theoretical thought on Francis's part, and is by no means representative of the entire sample of this study or of students that claimed to know, just a more general concern he had about male students being receptive to the concept itself, and particularly gender and sex.

Mark, a senior, believed that privilege should be taught in more than just Gender and Women's Studies courses, stating:

I feel like it's come up in high school in like a Social Studies-that type of course. But it was never explained very well. It was more just like 'Hey this is who you are. You have privilege, not really. This is what privilege is or how other people experience privilege differently. So, like Gender and Women's Studies really had like the best definition or explanations of privilege that I've like really understood and helped me accept it and then understand it more and then have an idea of how it can be used to benefit other people or other people don't have that same opportunity. I don't-maybe not necessarily a whole unit or intensive study of it but at least one or two classes having that would be beneficial because I feel like regardless of whether you make a unit out of it or not it comes into play with most subjects that happen within Gender and Women's Studies. And by

understanding your own privilege you can understand the topics more within the different courses I feel like.

This quote coincides with the general idea that all participants held when presented with the question of whether or not GWS courses should solely teach about privilege, or if it should be taught uniformly outside of those spaces as well. Two other participants also indicated that learning about social justice issues, and specifically privilege, would be beneficial should it be taught at a younger age, since younger kids would be more open and receptive to it. This would, conceivably, counteract a lot of the resistance students might have to feminism, and encourage them to critically think about their own positionality in society rather than having to come to a Gender and Women's Studies course in order to learn about privilege. The following section demonstrates that, privilege is perceived to be a beneficial tool for the young males interviewed for this study. They may not have had the same knowledge, or experiences coming in, but the fact that they all stand by privilege as a necessary part of education about feminist perspectives and social justice, shows that learning about privilege bolstered their undergraduate education.

#### *Deployment of Privilege*

Given that all six participants agreed that privilege should be taught to undergraduate students, and also to other age groups beforehand, this section discusses how the young males interviewed for this study learned to use their privilege to make a difference, either inside or outside of the classroom. The instances of deploying privilege is meant to be a positive step, and by deploying privilege I mean that the male students are "checking" their privilege, or utilizing their awareness to not do harm to disadvantaged groups. This means using their privilege and awareness to help educate their male peers or to make the feminist classroom a more mindful space when engaging in class discussions.

As mentioned before, the idea of “listening” was consistently brought up as something that the participants all did mindfully to participate as part of class discussions. All six participants brought up that they made a point to remain receptive to what was happening during class discussions, even when they disagreed with what was being said. By staying engaged and not turning away from what is being discussed this finding counteracts what I had anticipated-disengagement. Instead of turning away and becoming resistant to material, the participants of this study instead made it a point to “check” their privilege and to keep their ears and minds open during the course of their time in their Gender and Women’s Studies courses. Here are some examples from the transcripts:

Francis: it depends on the class but I usually prefer to listen and to talk and like I liked going to the class and listening to what other people had to say listening to the lectures and watching whatever videos we had to watch about it. Yeah, I liked the class I don’t think I thought about dropping out once.

Mickey: Like during the violence against women segments, and when they’re talking mostly about women, I don’t raise my opinion because it’s not for me to say, it’s their-it’s their opinion, it’s their decision.

Mark: I always like to sit back and listen to what everyone is saying and then address the situation. So then, I was just listening for a while and then I raised my hand just a little and then I was like ‘do I wanna jump into this or not?’ And someone else would say a point and then so it kinda the group as a whole-they weren’t all one-sided either.

Logan: We were discussing sexuality and religion and so I think someone had said something about like Christians or you know, I forgot what the nature of the conversation or the comment was then, but it had something to do with sexuality and religion, and I

had a lot of things to say but I didn't. I guess, because-I, by nature, am not too confrontational, but at the same time I didn't want to like add fuel to the fire, so to speak, or say anything that would trickle into something else.

Tony: And so I would get to listen to what other people would say so...that was a help definitely because I got to hear more opinions from more people about these subjects and that was always nice. I didn't have much to raise my hand to-sometimes I did-but only after reading that chapter very thoroughly. So it was definitely good in larger class discussions for me to hear what other people had to say.

These examples demonstrate counter-examples to what I expected to find in the study, but could also be evidence of them staying silent and becoming passive observers and participants in the classroom, which could be due to their outsider status. I assumed that male students tended to not speak up because they were busy disregarding what was being taught. Yet, when the participants here are voicing that they are engaging but not wanting to own the space, it makes it much more difficult to determine if their passiveness in the space is embodying the privilege of not speaking or checking it in order to hear other perspectives. I take these responses to be indicative of checking their privilege, or respecting other perspectives to emerge among the discourse. It could be possible that the characteristic of listening, instead of verbal engagement, coincides with comfort and ease as well as with privilege. Meaning that students may be more comfortable in the classroom space by listening. But an additional layer to that comfort is that they are checking or embodying their privilege in choosing to engage or not. I contend that these interviews prove that those silent male students, who speak sparingly in class, are not disregarding what is being taught fully, but that the spectrum of disengagement, mentioned in previous chapters, needs to

broaden for future findings to contextualize feminist research on male students outside of the traditional cautionary tale of the “resistant male student.”

One outlier from the deployment of privilege section is that those with previous knowledge, specifically participants Mickey and Silas, both freshmen, used their privilege to educate their peers about issues that are pertinent to feminism. As evidenced in their quotes below:

Mickey: Well, if it's someone I know-I'll tell them 'Hey, stop you're being an ass' and I've actually had to do that with a couple of my friends. One of my friends was a Meninist for a while; I don't know if you know what that is. He followed the Meninist Twitter and I was like 'Dude, that's awful. That's really awful.' And I set him straight...

Silas: Uh, I, I would say personal activism-like things as far as like engaging conversations with people who might not understand these things or are saying things like incorrectly and I would correct or like give them an idea of why that is wrong to say. So, like, by that I would say I like did some sort of activism but like on a more grand scale not quite yet.

It seems that Gender and Women's Studies courses, which would have taught them about relevant social justice issues, can empower them to educate their male peers. The next section deals with how the participants felt about men's participation in feminist classes and activism, the roles of men in feminism, and the importance of men in feminism.

#### *Theme Four: The Intersection of Men and Feminism*

This section deals with the fourth overarching theme that was brought up in the interviews, that of men and feminism, a key part of this project. Participants were asked why they had decided to take a Gender and Women's Studies course. Four of the six participants

indicated that they took a GWS course because it counted as a Diversity Credit, a requirement for undergraduate students to have in order to graduate, or it either fit with their schedule or they needed another offering from the courses, such as a Writing Intensive Credit, another graduation requirement.

Despite having taken the course for a required credit or scheduling convenience, all six participants parallel when they agree that it is important to have students, regardless of gender identity, involved in undergraduate studies at their institution, learn and take Gender and Women's Studies courses. Five participants indicated that they had had their perspective widened as a result of taking GWS courses either prior to the current semester or during their semester on one or more issues. The outlier there was Mickey, who claimed that he was only taking the Intro course for GWS. His familiarity with the subject meant that he was learning material that he already knew.

#### *The Place of Men in Feminist Goals/Projects*

My findings in this section coincide with male students as minorities in majority female classes in Gender and Women's Studies. As I theorized this project, I believed that I could get to some solution to bring males into feminism. But focusing on "recruiting" them was the wrong way to go about thinking of this. Men should not be "recruited" into feminism; privilege would work to make their voices more centered at the expense of the historical site that women and people of color had fought for in institutional spaces. It is not the job of feminist teachers to make space for male students to further be privileged in the space of Gender and Women's Studies classrooms. Instead, if this project considers the systemic aspect of privilege and oppression it is not effective to just have men teacher other men about social justice. This would lead to the history of privilege, of men being the "holders" of true knowledge, reified in the

process of the supposed “liberating” message. Instead, based on my own pedagogy and experience, I would complicate it by saying that males should be allowed to listen. Not to be privileged, not to disrupt, but to participate. Being made into a minority in that space, when outside of the classroom that might not necessarily be the case, as many participants touched on as a key part of learning to see social justice issues as a result of social inequalities in the way society is configured. This chapter has already gone over the backlash that males get from even considering enrolling in GWS courses, but when asked about whether men should participate in GWS courses and activism, Logan, a senior, stated:

Yeah, an absolute resounding yes. Probably moreso after the fact that in taking the class, you realize whether or not you identify the minority or the majority you become aware of the fact that these issues impact us on varying levels and so the fact that we’re all personally invested-whether or not we recognize that is important. And so with that being said, wherever you sort of identify or where you are as individual taking these classes just helps you recognize that you’re part of like a bigger social picture and you just have this social responsibility to-contribute or be at least aware of the fact that there are all of these different issues and that they impact you as well.

Logan’s perspective can be argued as a crucial aspect for male students learning to identify with how others must feel when it comes to the results of systems of oppression such as racism, classism, sexism, ableism, etc. It seems as if resistance, specifically the type of resistance this research project was looking for wasn’t present, at least not tangibly given the responses the participants gave in their interviews.

All participants indicated that they had not had equal ratios of males to females in their GWS courses. Since the gender ratio is arguably a key point in the “minority status” brought up



earlier, this ratio of more men taking GWS courses could be problematized should more men be required, or actively encouraged by their advisors, to take more Gender and Women's Studies courses. Perhaps the more equal ratio of men and women would impact the insider/outsider status negatively, and men wouldn't feel the need to have their mind opened since that "minority" status is no longer present if they make up half of the class in numbers. What makes this complicated is that there is no one answer.

Tony, a senior, also expressed the desire for GWS courses to be required, given that he saw sexist behaviors among his male peers, especially with how it impacted the women in his life, in a particularly detrimental way:

Just considering how big of a problem it is. If not specifically the class that I took or Gender and Women's Studies as a full semester-long course at least bring it up. Mention it within a particular course that is required of 'this is all the weird terrible crap that happens, and this is why it's terrible. And this is how you should behave in these sorts of situations.' Just to make sure that, obviously not everybody has learned how you should treat other people. Of course, I don't know how you could reform the behavior of an entire student body. You can't just brainwash them all but lessons, lectures, required material that actually does contribute to better behavior along these lines I think would be a great thing to institute.

When asked what participants would suggest to get more students involved, particularly male students, into Gender and Women's Studies, they seemed to agree on the need for males to take GWS classes. Participants also believed that there would be backlash by making it a requirement. What also makes recruitment difficult is that GWS is often seen as an "impractical" choice of credit, even for students who are already majoring in social sciences or the humanities.

Tying the economics to what students take can also be a big part of why male students don't want to take it. Another participant, Mark, mentioned that it might be important for advisors, particularly, to endorse taking GWS classes, even as electives. Doing so would get them in the door and it could help debunk a lot of the popular myths about feminism. It would also help male students particularly, and students overall, regardless of major, in making the social and political climate of the college campus into a more accountable and less hegemonic space.

The issue of men engaging in not only feminism, but activism as well, is shared by Silas, who hopes to become an activist and challenge the aspects of rape culture that are present on college campuses. He argues:

One of my goals like while my time on this campus is that I want to see more male-identifying activism or like social justice based things on campus. Um...because like the male population is a large part of our population in general and if they're not up to snuff or if they're not participating then it's really difficult to do actual change. Um, cuz that's a lot of people.

Men, particularly those that are harmed by the nature of the construction of masculinity, could need feminism to understand the perils of hypermasculinity that is unachievable. Silas shares the frustrations of many feminists in wanting like-minded people to organize to change what they deem detrimental to society. Any education that hopes to be enlightening about "feminist issues" should not be done so at the expense of making systems of privilege more real in the process.

Mickey, a freshman, who wants men to be more active in feminism and GWS, shared the following:

Yes. Feminism should be completely unapologetic because men have not apologized. I mean they're probably starting to. When they realize 'Hey, you know men are being awful and we should stop that' then they're realizing-they're being a little bit more apologetic about it and watching their actions. But other than that-feminism should plow through the lands like Sherman's march to the sea, leave no prisoners. Yeah, without. Not actual genocide but educate people. And if somebody goes 'Fuck this, but Men's Rights- You say: 'No, women are getting murdered [this is] how it is and this needs to stop' and that's how it should be.

I would agree with Mickey, not only because he shared my own personal beliefs that feminist education doesn't need to hold space for men, because of their privileged position, but because he gets at a key point. That is that the main obstacle for people is how patriarchy demonizes and belittles feminism, and any suggestions this project would make would be to have some of effort to debunk those myths on a systemic level, be it through institutional advisors, peer education, or another possible avenue. Students learning more about feminism and social justice could be more widespread if students, as a whole, were dissuaded from many of the myths that surrounded what a Gender and Women's Studies class, and feminism, were actually about, and not what hegemonic ideology says it is.

### *The Importance of Men in Feminism*

This section deals specifically with how participants responded when asked about the importance of men in feminism. Gender and Women's Studies is often a "found major," which means that only those with prior knowledge end up going to these classes, while other take them for conceivably an easy grade or to meet a graduation requirement (Case, 2007; Case, 2007; McDavid, 1988; Stake, 2006). If men, who make up half of the population, on a college campus

are not involved in making their institution a more equal and fair place for all people then inequality will continue unchecked. This is why I think it is important to have male students brought into feminist classrooms and brought to understand what their participation, and the importance of it to the movement, can have.

Silas, a freshman, argues that, in addition to wanting more men to get involved in campus activism, that GWS classes would be beneficial for this reason:

For instance I feel that a lot of the people who take GWS classes are people who already have prior knowledge or need to for their major or a different major that they're taking that are kind of along these lines. And then obviously you have some people that are interested or really don't know what they're getting into. But I'd say like...that's a very small percentage of people here on campus. If there are 15,000 students and approximately like 8 to 12% of these people are taking classes like these or have this kind of information there's another like 90 to like 88 percent that have no idea about this information and like it's not reaching them. And I feel like there's a lot of inequalities that are noticed on campus as well as just things that people don't understand. Like I've had a lot of conversations with people on my floor who don't understand these things, and I just-I feel like at least taking a class like this and seeing things taught in a way that like...shows both sides...would be very helpful for a lot of students especially coming in from high school who haven't had this kind of information provided to them prior to that. Silas illustrates my point, that by not having like-minded men, to fight inequalities in their own community, especially on campuses where things such as the sexual assault of LGBT people and racial/ethnic exclusion. Not much can theoretically change without the majority's support, since men occupy a position of privilege given their gender.

Logan and Francis, a senior and a freshman respectively, also believe that it is important for male students to take GWS courses, even if they don't get involved in activism, simply because:

Logan: Yeah, that makes-I would definitely agree with that. I think that's especially important, it just gives them the tools to be able to think about I would say-the tools that would be one of the most important thing-to give them the ability to think about these things whether or not, however or not they apply and to just give them the tools that are important. At least through like courses.

Francis: I actually think they should actually. Because like I was just saying everyone knows women or...half of the population is probably women. Or a man. And we all interact with each other regardless of your sexual orientation if you want to bring that up. And...I don't know I just think it's something that we need to learn how to interact with each other better. And to be able to know the struggles that are going on with each other. Like...I don't know your best friend might be a girl and she might be making less than you at the same job and it's really hard for her to make rent or something just because she's a woman that's...I mean that's crappy. That shouldn't be happening.

Both Francis and Logan bring up that the inequalities of society "shouldn't be happening," and the complacency of their male peers is sure to be frustrating on some level. Logan's point about giving male students "tools" coincides with learning about privilege, and being able to hold space for those kinds of conversations that might center on feminist interests or social justice issues. Other research has found that students who do take and become involved in Gender and Women's Studies are more likely to have reduced bias and a higher penchant for activism around

social inequalities (Basu & Reinitz & Thomsen, 2002; Hoffman & Stake, 2001; Sevelius & Stake, 2003; Stake, 2006).

Both Silas and Logan, along with the other participants interviewed, exemplify that learning about identity, political, and social issues are a big part of a Gender and Women's Studies course for these students. The issues with the demonization of feminism, the backlash and questioning from student's peers don't simply go away. Some of the suggestions the participants can help get more students, particularly those that might have a false impression of GWS, to become active agents of change within feminism.

## **Conclusion**

### *Unexpected Findings*

One of the most interesting findings of this study is the amount of students who had prior knowledge of feminism, and Gender and Women's Studies, beforehand. Students with prior knowledge were much more likely, for instance, to be critical of male students and the culture that kept them complacent and from taking GWS courses. Others who had either only taken one course were more accepting of their peers not wanting to get involved or to elect to not take GWS courses, despite advocating for it to be beneficial.

Another interesting finding is that almost all of the participants reported not having been outright resistant, or disengaging, from the class. Only four students indicated that they had actively disagreed with a classmate or the teacher on occasion, but that they self-reported having still been involved while the discussion was taking place. This provided interesting counter-examples of what I expected to find, which was a higher number of students who had difficulty participating in class discussion, or who refused to get involved because they felt as if they were being attacked by class materials.

Students also reported not feeling defensive about course materials or by class discussion. This can be attributed to how the discussion, on something such as gender and sexual violence, can be seen as a consequence of the system of gender and culture, and presented as systemic problems. The salient point is if male students felt that men were portrayed negatively, as two indicated, they acknowledged it was not as an indictment of them as a whole gender, or individually, but a consequence of how society is configured and has to change for the betterment of all people.

### *Final Thoughts*

Although the sample size of this interview study is not representative of the general population, the results of this study demonstrate that for male students Gender and Women's Studies classes have made a difference in their perspectives.

Something that has come up as a consistent issue for getting male students involved is the demonization of feminism in the mainstream media, and among their peers. Part of this is due to how men are expected to be and act, and it would be beneficial for future departments to consider having an outreach initiative for students to take Gender and Women's Studies, regardless of gender. This shift could have a snowball effect, and could result in them encouraging their friends to take them. The logic there is that changing the minds of the few amasses to those around them, which is a positive attribute that can be said of the participants. They all reported having carried their feminist perspectives into teaching their peers, families, and others around them about what feminism, and Gender and Women's Studies are really about. They are about the importance of identity pluralism, positioning those in marginalized positions as the focus of initiatives for equality, and carrying those principles of acceptance, love, and accountability for one's actions, regardless of any identities or differences into lived practice.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This thesis demonstrates the multifaceted relationship male students have with their experiences as subjects of study as it relates to feminist theory and pedagogy, and how participants navigated the contradictions of being a male student in a female populated space such as a Gender and Women's Studies classroom. I argue that it is essential that those in power, particularly privileged students in GWS courses, be empowered to think differently based on social justice activist and feminist educator models of education. I also argued that men's participation and education could theoretically give justice-based social and cultural movements traction, particularly when it comes to being examples for other men's involvement in other capacities. Results from the study revealed that male students who had or have taken Gender and Women's Studies classes at this particular campus in the Midwest held somewhat similar, and oftentimes differing, perspectives regarding their position as learners and individuals in the classroom. All of the participants, for example, indicated that they identified as a feminist, or held feminist values to be true to them. However, the study revealed that male students have other differing experiences as well. Male students had other concerns and perspectives as well.

Results showed that the media, and the participants' peers, and support networks had detractors, or they were at the very least aware of, the popular backlash against feminism. Male students did not get encouraged, or did not feel encouraged, depending on their support networks, to become involved in social justice, feminism, or Gender and Women's Studies



classes. Men felt as if they could not have a place in Gender and Women's Studies. This was a consistent barrier that had to be overcome by at least two of the participants. Some participants had prior knowledge of the course content and materials covered in Gender and Women's Studies, and were more likely to participate, while those that did not were more likely to experience some level of discomfort, given the strain of topics they had not known about, such as privilege, sexism, and racial justice. Results also showed that students with or without prior knowledge who were not privileged in some aspect, such as the study having two participants of color (one Black, another Asian), and three participants not identifying as heterosexual were more likely to be receptive to and see truth in feminist course materials when they took a Gender and Women's Studies courses. It could be that their lived experiences of discrimination based on those factors, their knowledge of being disempowered as a result of those positional factors of their intersecting identities was made more visible and lent credit to the courses they were enrolled in. Confirmation bias was likely, since only a certain type of student or person is likely to volunteer to be interviewed as a part of reporting on their experiences as an underrepresented group in a class. This variable should be brought into consideration when reading these results.

Results show that participation of other students, and male students in particular, in Gender and Women's Studies and social justice, was important to every participant. Participants had varying degrees with which they felt males should be made to participate. Some felt that the enrollment and participation of students was dependent on debunking a lot of the popular demonization that feminism gets from the mainstream media. Others suggested that making these core GWS classes required for all students to take would lead to more change, regardless of the backlash from them being mandatory. Other participants indicated that students, particularly male students, should not take the class if they are not ready to hear what it has to say, and that

they should not be met where they are. Male students, and students of every gender, however, should not just be going off of popular depictions of feminism or the judgment of their support networks when deciding to take GWS courses. Furthermore, male students should be to not have their experiences centered in the class. This is because it would take away from the space being a site of “co-production” of knowledge centered on women’s experiences that feminist pedagogy, and critical pedagogy, strives for. Instead, men who wish to put in the work of “checking” their privileged identities should, arguably, be allowed to participate in a receptive listening capacity without be anymore privileged than any other student for the sake of the classroom space.

Results also showed a positive correlation with privilege being a beneficial course material that students learned from, and suggested it be used as an educational tool outside of the Gender and Women’s Studies classroom. It should also be mentioned that male students awareness of social issues that were of feminist concern (sexual harassment, rape law legislation, political inequality, sex education) were all discussed passionately by those interviewed for this study. They demonstrated an awareness of the privileged systems they occupied while utilizing them to listen to what their other peers had to say, with three participants actively engaging in conversations and changing the minds of their colleagues or support networks in some way about misinformation about feminism. What I took away from the suggestions of the participants is that it is not the goal of feminism to make space for men but for men to make room in their lives for participation in feminism. This means that a certain amount of work has to be put in by men in order to understand feminism, and that work could provide a space for that conscientization to happen organically, since it might be beneficial for other students to learn from.

Although none of the students expressed resistance or disengagement as I saw it manifesting, there was concern over how males were visible as minorities in their classroom,

both to their classmates and to the professor. This was complicated given that women are still much more likely to take GWS courses than male students. Some of the suggestions, such as debunking the myths of feminism either by advisors, or through course recommendations by separate departments, or by making GWS courses mandatory, all should be considered based on the feedback of all students, not just male students, of what could increase student presence in the GWS courses. Men can become involved in activist work around anti-violence or campus activism, and especially participation in Gender and Women's Studies. This study was important because it weighed the aspects of feminist pedagogy in conversation with how male students saw themselves, and puts those both into context around the idea of privilege. This included how privilege was learned, used, thought about, and deployed by male students and taught by feminist educators in varying circumstances. This study was also important because it gave voice to male students who wanted to see more students and activists get involved in inequalities that are currently persisting, and may not only be happening on this campus institution, but on several.

The results of this study and the recommendations here could be useful to a variety of campus organizations, feminist teachers, Gender and Women's Studies Departments, other academic departments that use critical pedagogy and/or deal with defensive learning in their student population, educational institutions interested in feminist pedagogy and how that reflects on privileged students, organizations, administrators, Deans of colleges, students, researchers, faculty, feminists, and activists. Feminist teachers could use these findings for the purpose own pedagogy, even when going as far as how to integrate privilege into the curriculum of their own courses. This study also aids Gender and Women's Studies Departments interested in theorizing about privileged students in their courses. Additionally, this study built upon previous research about resistant male students and their role in the feminist classroom, and how that intersected

with ideas of privilege, resistance, and disengagement. It is my hope that this research created a new dialogue about, not just male, but all privileged students and their participatory role in feminist learning, activism, and social justice.

Future research should include a more thorough sample of male students who had or have been enrolled in Gender and Women's Studies courses, so as to be generalizable and representative of certain campus demographics. The current study was conducted by convenience sampling and recruited either past or current students in Gender and Women's Studies courses. Follow up studies should investigate more thoroughly how privilege is taught and learned about by privileged students, and be more longitudinal in how they are receptive to or not receptive to learning about it. Future research should also investigate how male students who already believe in feminism conceptualize privilege. This study also raises questions about whether feminist educators can or should do to meet privileged students where they are, and go against merely classifying them as resistant when they may not participate. Future research should focus on how feminist pedagogy and teaching can be utilized and measure different pedagogical techniques and course content's reception among privileged students over a period of time.

I want to believe that there is a place for all people who are privileged to have a place in feminism. This is one of my biases but I think the same personal transformation can be there for the benefit of somebody else. The movement needs people. While it might not be the job of Gender and Women's Studies to bridge that gap, the future holds consideration of a space where men can be accountable to women. I had seen it happen, to myself and others, the process that changing minds can have. Privilege is a barrier, but it's not an insurmountable one. I want to think that everyone can bridge that gap, and if they're willing, hold communion in participation

for the betterment of this troubled world. My bias is that I want to believe that people can change, especially privileged people (i.e. men, White, cisgender, heterosexual, middle to upper class). A difficulty for me was seeing and interrogating how my own privileged identities (my cis, hetero, masculine, Whiteness) influenced how I interviewed during the process and expected the outcomes to fit how I thought it should turn out. The difficult question that this thesis is not trying to answer is where, how, and when privileged people can participate without making their participation centered in a way that makes hegemonic power reified? Is there a case to be made for recruiting men, and other privileged people? My white masculinity showed up in this project, thinking that, in some way, I would reach some sort of conclusion as to whether or I would get some sort of answer for this. This is partly why I chose this topic, because I have a personal stake in feminism. If privileged people, even men, don't have a place in feminism, or aren't worthy of learning about it, then how did I do it? What's my place in feminism? Am I doing something right that they aren't? What makes me different from other undergraduate students that I didn't get a chance to interview? Their voices are already overheard in culture, but if they wanted to, and they knew what feminism was actually about, wouldn't they want to be a part of it in some way? Or would they not wish to participate when they learned that the work was not *about* their participation being highlighted? These all run through my head as I conceived this project and as I finish, with more questions than answers, and my future scholarship will continue to get at this concept.

Appendix 1:  
Recruitment Flyer

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY



### *Understanding Male Student Experiences in Gender and Women's Studies Classrooms*

- We are conducting research to find out men's experiences in Gender and Women's Studies classes at this university.
- Participants must be male-identified undergraduate students at MSU, Mankato and be, or been enrolled in a core Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) course for the Spring 2016 semester or a previous one.
- One-on-One interviews will be conducted with participants for the duration of 60 to 90 minutes. Questions will be about participants' experiences and responses to their GWS classes.
- Participants will receive a twenty dollar Amazon gift card as well as advance scholarship in the field.

MSU IRBNet ID Number: 823726

Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025	Contact: Cassano & Tynell Please email Cassano, Irene@jhu.edu or call 507-389-5025
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Dear Potential Study Participant,

My name is Cameron Tyrrell. I am a graduate student from the Gender and Women's Studies department at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and my research is supervised by Dr. Ana Perez. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study on male students' experiences in a Gender and Women's Studies classes. You will be eligible to be in this study if you are currently enrolled in a Gender and Women's Studies class and are male-identified.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview. You will also receive compensation in the form of a ten dollar Amazon gift card. The interview questions will pertain to your experiences in a Gender and Women's Studies classroom, your attitudes on feminism, and some questions about how your male-identity affects your experiences in the classroom. Each interview will last from sixty to ninety minutes on a mutually agreed upon time and location on campus. With your informed consent, these interviews will be audio recorded for data transcription purposes. Audio recordings of the interviews and transcriptions will be stored using password protection technology for 3 years. Within three years of original data collection, audio files, notes, and focus group transcriptions will be destroyed or erased.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose to end your participation during or after the interview. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email Cameron at [Cameron.tyrrell@mnsu.edu](mailto:Cameron.tyrrell@mnsu.edu) or Dr. Ana Perez at [ana.perez@mnsu.edu](mailto:ana.perez@mnsu.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Cameron Tyrrell

Dr. Ana Perez



MSU IRBNet ID Number: 823726

Appendix 3:  
Consent Form

***Understanding Male Student Experiences in Gender and Women's Studies Classrooms***  
**Consent Form**

You are being asked to take part in a research study the experiences of male colleges students in the Gender and Women's Studies undergraduate classroom. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about?** The purpose of this study is to learn about the male student learning experience in Gender and Women's Studies classes. This research might help establish methods to improve student experiences in Gender and Women's Studies classes. You must be a male and currently enrolled in a Gender and Women's Studies class at Minnesota State University, Mankato in order to participate.

**What we will ask you to do?** If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experiences as a male in the class, your responses to course content, your thoughts on gender issues and feminism, and how the course affects your life outside of the classroom. Interviews will last between sixty to ninety minutes. With your permission, we will digitally-record the interview for electronic transcription purposes. The materials gathered will be used as data for analysis as part of a graduate thesis about understanding male student experiences in Gender and Women's Studies classes at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

**Risks and benefits:** There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your experience enrolled in the course to be sensitive in nature and create some social discomfort.

**Compensation:** All participants will receive a ten dollar Amazon gift card. Even if you elect to not complete the interview process or elect to not have your results reported you will still receive the compensation for your time as a participant.

**Your answers will be confidential.** All information obtained in this project will be kept private by the principle investigator of this research project. All information will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Minnesota State University, Mankato. It can be viewed only by authorized research staff members. No names will be recorded other than on the consent forms. The IRecorder Application for the iPhone will be used to record each interview and will then be transferred over to an encrypted external hard drive to be stored electronically. All audio interview files will be permanently deleted from the iPhone after they are transferred over to the external hard drive. For data analysis, the audio files will be moved onto a password protected laptop computer that only they and the principle investigator and the secondary investigator have access to. The audio files will then be transcribed electronically using Express Scribe Pro software and removed of any identifying participant information. After transcription, the transcriptions will then be analyzed and following that process they will be permanently deleted

Participant Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

from the laptop computer. The audio and transcription files will be stored electronically on the external hard drive in the principle investigator's office for three years and will then be permanently deleted. Your privacy will also be protected by using alternate names on the stored electronic audio and transcription files to ensure anonymity.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time. If you decide later that you don't want your interview to be included in the final study, the researcher will delete your interview and any transcribed electronic data.

**If you have questions:** The researchers conducting this study are Cameron Tyrrell and Dr. Ana Perez. If you have any further questions you may contact Cameron Tyrrell at [Cameron.tyrrell@mnsu.edu](mailto:Cameron.tyrrell@mnsu.edu) or at 1-801-671-8635. You can reach Dr. Perez at [ana.perez@mnsu.edu](mailto:ana.perez@mnsu.edu) or 1- 507-389-5026. You also may contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 389-1242 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) with any questions about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Participant Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

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You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.*

Participant Initials: \_\_\_\_\_



January 21, 2016

Dear Ana Perez, Doctorate:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[823726-4] Understanding Male Student Experiences in Gender and Women's Studies Classrooms"  
Review Level: Level [I]

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of January 14, 2016. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, we wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the Associate Vice-President of Research and Dean of Graduate Studies immediately.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year less a day from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must submit a Closure request (see <http://grad.mnsu.edu/irb/continuation.html>). All documents related to this research must be stored for a minimum of three years following the date on your Closure request. Please include your IRBNet ID number with any correspondence with the IRB.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining signed consent forms in a secure location at MSU for 3 years following the submission of a Closure request. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online (see <http://grad.mnsu.edu/irb/storingconsentforms.pdf>).

Sincerely,

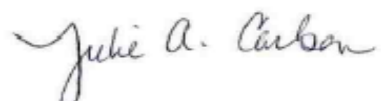
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Hadley".

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.  
IRB Coordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Sifers".

Sarah Sifers, Ph.D. LP  
IRB Co-Chair

---



Julie Carlson, Ed.D.  
IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB's records.

Appendix 5:  
Interview Questions  
**Learning in a Gender and Women's Studies Classroom**

Interview Questions

***Opening Statement:***

*Thank you for coming!*

*I plan on this interview taking roughly 60-90 minutes. Please let me know if you need to leave early.*

*Today I will gather your opinions and views about your experience taking a Gender and Women's Studies class.*

*There are no wrong or right answers-I welcome all perspectives. All information that you share with me today will be kept confidential. I will begin with some general demographic questions and shift to more specific questions about your experiences. Please let me know if you need to take a break. You can end your participation at any time.*

- 1) What is your age:
- 2) Year and Major:
- 3) Which GWS classes are/have you taken:
- 4) Hometown:
- 5) Race or Ethnicity:
  
- 6) For what reason did you decide to enroll in a Gender and Women's Studies class? What is the title of the class you enrolled in?
- 7) Before taking this course-what did you know about it? What types of topics did you expect to learn about?
- 8) What was your opinion of feminism (and Gender and Women's Studies) before you ever stepped into class?
- 9) Do you think Gender and Women's Studies classes should be required for every student to take during their undergraduate studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato? Why or why not?
- 10) At any time during the semester have you felt like dropping the course? If so, why?

- 11) Have there been times during the semester when you have felt like a minority? If so, why do you think this is the case? To follow up with this question further, if you have felt like a minority in the classroom, what did this feel like? Did you feel excluded? Blamed? Targeted? All of the above?
- 12) Have you ever felt singled out or attacked by course materials? If so, can you share this experience with me? What specific aspects about this experience do you remember the most?
- 13) If there are other male students in your course, have you ever sought them out to confirm an experience of yours? Why or why not?

***Thank you so much for your participation thus far. Now we are going to shift into questions about being a male student.***

- 14) Before enrolling in a Gender and Women's Studies class, how had you thought about your gender identity? If yes, in what other instances had you thought about your gender identity? If no, why not?
- 15) If you were to tell your male friends that you were taking a Gender and Women's Studies course, how do you think they would react? If your male co-workers, friends, family members know that you are currently taking this course, what was their first reaction upon hearing about it?
- 16) Do you think men are portrayed negatively in Gender and Women's Studies course? If so, why do you think this is? Can you think of an example from your own experiences?
- 17) How do you think of your male identity after learning about privilege? Do you think that there is an advantage to being male? If so, can you think of an example that helps you think of this kind of privilege?
- 18) Were you aware of privilege beforehand? If not, what is your stance on privilege as a part of Gender and Women's Studies course content?
- 19) Do you ever find yourself disagreeing with the professor or female classmate in your course? If so, how have you done this? For example, have you ever disagreed publically in class? Or shared your disagreement with another class member?
- 20) Have you ever felt the need to "correct" a classmate or the professor of your course for presenting something that you don't agree with? (*Probe: Can you say more about this experience?*)
- 21) If you disagree with something that a professor or classmate says, does this make you feel like not staying interested in the class material? If so, how do you go about disengaging



from the class? For example, do you find yourself not taking notes, texting during class, or other activities?

22) Have you ever intentionally remain silent during class? If so, have you tried to speak during in class, but found it difficult to engage after not speaking for a while?

23) If you disagree with something that a professor or classmate says, does this make you feel like not coming to class all together? If so, how many times would you say you have missed class because of this reason?

24) How has your opinion of feminism changed/not changed as a result of taking this course?

25) If you could provide some suggestions to your professor, what might you share with her about how to engage male students?

### **Post-Interview Survey**

#### **Conclusion**

26) Is there anything that you heard here that was really important to you and you want to address before we leave?

27) Is there anything we have missed that would be important for me to know?

28) I am planning on doing more interviews similar to this one, what advice do you have for me in terms of structure and content?

29) You have given me a lot to think about...thank you so much for your time and participation!

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