

MASCULINITY & OBJECTIFICATION

A phenomenological study of contemporary shifts in masculinity

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Abstract

Notions of masculinity are changing. Many men conduct themselves in ways that blunt traditional hegemonic masculine norms of sexism and homophobia. Do these changes represent movement toward gender equality, or are they workings of an adaptive and amorphous system of power relations that is reshaping to fit with the times? This thesis is grounded within epistemologies of feminist standpoint theory and takes a phenomenological approach to methodology in investigating how men construct and experience their perceptions of masculinity and gender performance within homosocial networks. I conducted three focus groups with different male friend groups, and one focus group of a women's friend group. These are supplemented with an autoethnographic focus on reflexivity in which I investigate my own thoughts, reflections, and past life experiences in concert with these focus groups. I used objectification as a main theme of study both to understand the more nuanced qualities of its role within gender relations, and as a springboard to understand the wider ramifications of what attitudes toward objectification represented. These focus groups demonstrated wide gaps in phenomenological accounts and understandings of everyday life activity both between women and men, and between men and other men. Two themes emerged from the data. The first trend involved contemporary constructions of masculinity that incorporate historically unmasculine behaviors and attitudes. This is explored within debates of R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and two of its offshoots: inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009), and hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe 2014). The second theme focused on empathy and the difficulties in its development when relationships of power, domination, and difference are involved. I argue that empathy needs to be developed in ways that favor more affective and compassionate forms of responding to others' emotions, rather than cognitive or role-taking forms that aim to understand others' emotions from their perspective. Finally, I incorporate these themes to discuss the possibilities, limitations, and complexities in forming a profeminist consciousness in men. This thesis aims to contribute to debates around recent changes and potential 'softening' in the structure of hegemonic masculinity by retaining a critical focus on relationships of power and domination. In doing so, I hope to skirt between the optimism of inclusive masculinity and the cynicism of hybrid masculinity to develop a model of profeminist consciousness that welcomes the softening of masculinity but places equal value in critically reflecting on one's power, privilege, and position within society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We are in an interesting time when it comes to gender and equality. Arguments against inequality and criticisms of structures of power that uphold it dominate many corners of the both academic thought and popular media. Alongside this we can see the relations between genders and the very construction of them changing and diversifying as cultural values and awareness begin to upset how they had historically existed. Is this turbulence the starting of a sea change where equality and fair distribution of social and cultural capital among the various intersections of oppression can be realized? Or are we seeing a tepid response where structures of power shift just enough to answer the most pressing issues but do little to dismantle the relations of power that have dominated society for so long? This thesis presents a phenomenological investigation of how men manage their positions within homosocial groups during these times of shifting boundaries and fluid presentations of identity

Current theories of masculinity often rally around R. W. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity and its ability to adequately describe contemporary trends. New concepts have sprouted up that aim to either hasten the redundancy of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson 2009), or to tweak it to better fit with men today (Bridges & Pascoe 2014). I take a keen interest in throwing my hat into the ring and contributing to the discussion. While two opposing sides are well entrenched and have engaged in productive debate for some time now, the polarizing aspects of these opposing accounts serve to diminish what could potentially be a powerful way of analyzing contemporary changes. In this thesis, I discuss how we might theorize these changes with the intention of deconstructing systems of power and strengthening foundations for the development of equality. The aims of this thesis are threefold. First, to provide a critique of contemporary theories of masculinity and map out a way in which we can strip away the pitfalls and keep the useful parts to use in tandem toward future critical studies of masculinity. Second, I wish to provide a strong account of the necessity for men to engage with feminist standpoint theory when studying masculinity and to develop a profeminist consciousness. A masculine standpoint, it is argued, can be a powerful tool in analyzing and deconstructing the power of hegemonic masculinity by utilizing our proximity and connection to the lived experience that the theory details. A masculine standpoint should not be seen as a universal

perspective of all men, but one that addresses male privilege in context to the researcher's specific situation. Thus, as a white middle-class man I can address how my male privilege is situated within other forms of privilege and the ways this effects my standpoint. Men's privileged position provides us a powerful tool in which to begin to dismantle said privilege through a critical engagement with feminist theory written from a feminist standpoint. This standpoint is, however, on a shaky precipice that needs a strong framework to ward off potential missteps which can lead it right back onto the path of domination and privilege. Thus, I hope to complement this by proposing a phenomenology that entails a profeminist consciousness. Inspired by the writings of Sandra Bartky (1990), I undertake a reading and interpretation of one of her seminal papers considering how men could develop a complementary feminist consciousness.

While the focus of this thesis is on debates around hegemonic masculinity and its relevance in contemporary society, I use the concept and practice of objectification as a lens in which to discuss these wider themes. Objectification takes an important seat in this narrative, but my intention is not to make any profound philosophical enquiry into the nature of this nebulous term. Rather, I hope to use it as one small example of how masculinity is managed and negotiated in interesting and dynamic ways.

Chapter 2 discusses the main points of theory that this thesis engages with. Beginning with a brief explanation of gender and hegemonic masculinity, I move on to discuss two influential offshoots. First is Eric Anderson's (2009) notion of inclusive masculinity: A theory that interprets recent changes in masculinity as a positive and destabilizing force, which upsets traditional notions of masculinity and allows for expressions of masculinity based in equality and respect. Second is the theory of hybrid masculinity (Arxer 2015; Bridges & Pascoe 2014; Demetriou 2001). Hybrid masculinity addresses recent changes, such as those discussed in Anderson's theory, but argues that they represent a superficial change of style over substance which serve to reinforce the hegemonic power of men through the obscuration of overt forms of power that we hold. Objectification is then laid out in all its complexities. A crash course in its history is covered, including its potential origins in the works of Immanuel Kant and its subsequent appropriation by radical feminists such as Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin. I take Martha Nussbaum's (1995) influential paper on the subject as the authority on

objectification. I then discuss applications of objectification, such as the psychological effects the objectifying gaze can have on targets and the possible rewards or benefits that motivate its enactment. Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of empathy, detailing the difference between cognitive and affective aspects and their implications in developing prosocial attitudes across barriers of power and inequality.

Chapter 3 covers the ontological, epistemological, and methodological frameworks I use to embark on this investigation. First, I outline the methodological implications of phenomenology and the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Second, I review the epistemic position of feminist standpoint theory. I then take particular time to discuss and elaborate how a masculine standpoint can be developed within the framework of feminist standpoint theory. Implications of researcher privilege are covered, as well as the techniques and considerations I used to help mitigate issues that my privilege as a cis-gender man could present in this study. I then explain the methods I use, and the complications and limitations involved during study.

Chapter 4 builds upon the research I undertook in 2016 that this thesis is inspired by. The main focus of the chapter is on performances of masculinity and objectification within my own personal group of friends. I critically examine the way we developed the objectification of women as a way to build homosocial bonds – particularly through treating practices of objectification as a game. I use Martha Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification as a lens to analyze our actions and break it down into its different elements. I conclude that the way we utilize objectification treats women as objects but not players within our game. Our performance of objectification is played out to a masculine audience and only intended to build bonds between ourselves, garner masculine approval, and build a collective identity.

Chapter 5 uses the same data obtained in 2016 that chapter 4 focuses on. This chapter focuses on the ways in which we transform concrete subjective women into abstract symbols that represent our successful negotiation of masculinity

Chapter 6 compares the attitudes of all the masculine focus groups that I conducted. I take specific focus into accounting for a perceived increase in prosocial attitudes such as tolerance, respect, and compassion in FG2 and FG3. The contextual and temporal factors

involved in men's friendships are proposed to be important in how men manage emotions and intimacy. I analyze how different contextual elements such as environment and or motivations to spend time together differ in ways that may possibly lead to higher rates of sexist behaviors found in FG1.

Chapter 7 takes an in-depth analysis of how men and women perceive the consequences of objectification. This chapter focuses on the issues brought to light when attempts are made to build empathy between groups that occupy different positions in matrices of inequality. I argue that the drive for cognitive or perspective-taking forms of empathy are misguided and only ever achievable in a shallow sense. To do this, I explore the differences of perspective and experience of objectification between the men and women in the focus groups. Following Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) model of objectification theory, I explore the deep psychological implications that objectification has for women and compare that to the implications that objectification has for men. It is found that men's experiences of objectification cannot be used as a reference point when trying to build empathy for women due to a chasm between the two accounts. I then put forward an argument that affective or emotional forms of empathy provide us with a better tool for supporting compassionate attitudes toward women and prosocial motivation to change the status quo. Following this discussion, I revisit the role that cognitive empathy can play in developing these motivations and attitudes when combined with affective empathy as a model of dialogic learning and sharing that will help build solidarities that respect ontological and epistemological boundaries.

Chapter 2: Overview of Theory

This thesis borrows from a wide range of academic sources to put forth an analysis of masculinity and objectification. Two main arenas of thought are examined in my research. First, a critical evaluation of contemporary trends within western masculinity and its adaption to today's cultural milieu. The heart of this enquiry revolves around R.W. Connell's (2005) influential theory of hegemonic masculinity and two other strands of thought birthed through critical evaluation of this concept: Inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009), and hybrid masculinity (Demetriou 2001, Bridges & Pascoe 2014). I use these concepts to develop a critique of how contemporary masculinity is managed and performed in new and unexpected ways. Second, I use objectification as the lens through which to study these changes. Attitudes and practices of objectification by men were analyzed with the purpose of providing grounded experiences of how men navigate or reflect upon their masculinity. Sexual objectification has established itself within the popular imagination as a social issue, so I was interested in how men responded to this awareness in their own behaviors. Objectification is discussed in its theoretical and philosophical complexities, but also used as a starting point in which to branch out to related aspects of masculinity.

2.1 Gender

The theoretical approach I will take towards gender has been developed by the influential work of Judith Butler (1990) and her notion of gender performativity. She describes gender as being "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being" (Butler 1990, 33). In this theorization, gender has a tangible and significant effect in determining the life choices and expectations that individuals can pursue. However, this 'reality' is merely an illusion, a historical-cultural recitation of gender norms with no real basis in any form of biology or other sets of reductive principles. Repeated acts and utterances serve to reify both gender and sex, with 'sex' being immediately interpolated through language into a gendered term. Butler's notion of gender performativity undergirds my understanding of gender as a series of citational performances that subconsciously serve to harden the appearance of a solid gender identity. Objectification will thus be approached as a performative exercise; a way in

which men express masculinity outwardly, while at the same time substantiating an illusory sense of gender.

2.2 Masculinity

Masculinity as a sociological enquiry has become a strong tool for feminist critiques of gender inequality, patriarchy, and sexism in recent decades. The theoretical scope for masculinity is wide, with many conflicting ideas seeking purchase as preeminent explanations of men's behavior.

Hegemonic Masculinity

R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of 'hegemonic masculinity' is perhaps the most influential concept in studies of masculinity. Originating in the early 1980's and reformulated in 2005, hegemonic masculinity proposes a theory that seeks to understand both how men's dominance in gender hierarchies is maintained, and the multiple forms of masculinity that are subordinated to the narrow ideal of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 832) define hegemonic masculinity as

distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.

These authors argue that there are culturally celebrated, and mostly unachievable, frameworks of the 'perfect man'; an ideal type to which the spectrum of other masculinities are defined in relation to. What is particularly useful about this framework is the way it complicates and diversifies conceptions of masculinities into plural and overlapping forms. It explains how an idealized version of masculinity is created within a given culture that confers advantages, prestige, and power to those who can most closely live up to the ideal. Those who cannot are relegated to peripheral roles within the so-called public sphere. In doing so, it constantly reinforces men's dominance in society by placing a disproportionate amount of value upon men who, in tandem with economic domination, are further rewarded with higher levels of social and cultural capital. My research will interrogate the

ways in which objectification is used as a tool to strive for a hegemonic position within the masculine hierarchy.

Inclusive Masculinity

One particularly influential theory that has gained traction over the last decade is the concept of inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2008; Anderson 2009; McCormack 2011). This theory directly challenges ideas around hegemonic masculinity and other theories that posit masculinity as mainly problematic. Anderson argues that in the current western climate, masculinity has undergone a sea change of sorts, such that the harsh barriers that hindered the development of positive and inclusive attitudes and behaviors in men are quickly diminishing and leaving in its stead a model of masculinity that actively subverts a more “orthodox” style. This new model of masculinity heavily relies upon cultural perceptions of homosexuality, and in particular, what Anderson calls homophobia:

I use the term homophobia to describe the fear of being homosexualized, as it incorporates three variables: 1) mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation; 2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval of homosexuality, and the femininity that is associated with it; and 3) the need for men to publicly align their social identities with heterosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) in order to avoid homosexual suspicion (Anderson 2009, 7-8).

The power of homophobia in any given historical period frames the model of masculinity that dominates the cultural landscape. Anderson argues that the original formulation of hegemonic masculinity is based upon a period of high homophobia where

men’s gendered terrains are severely limited, as is physical intimacy between men . . . Accordingly, men’s demonstrations of intimacy are generally relegated to the public sphere (such as playing sports), and soft tactility is prohibited. Thus, boys and men have traditionally been prohibited from holding hands, softly hugging, caressing, or kissing . . . In such cultural moments, boys and men who do display physical or emotional intimacy are socially homosexualized and consequently stripped of their perceived masculinity (Anderson 2009, 8).

This model of masculinity has changed according to proponents of inclusive masculinity. It is posited that we now live in an age of diminishing homophobia where orthodox

masculinities exist alongside newer inclusive masculinities, and furthermore that this new form of masculinity will subsume more orthodox iterations leading to greater equality. This changes the structure of masculinity from a hierarchically based model of power and domination to a horizontal playing field where “multiple masculinities will proliferate without hierarchy and hegemony, and men are permitted an expansion of acceptable heteromasculine behaviors” (Anderson 2009, 97).

Inclusive masculinity has received a polarized reception within the academy. While many influential theorists of masculinity have come out in support of Anderson and his contemporaries’ work, it has also received wide criticism ranging from accusations of a lack of theoretical depth to condemnations of dangerous thinking that works to reinforce patriarchal systems of oppression (Bridges & Pascoe 2014; O’Neill 2015; de Boise 2015). One main point of contention is that inclusive masculinity’s focus on attitudes toward gay men demonstrates a lack of rigorous and intersectional analyses of many other aspects of gendered interaction. Most importantly, it does not make any in-depth comment on relations of power between men and women, instead focusing on relations of power between different masculinities.

Hybrid Masculinity

One final strand of thought important to this research is the idea of hybrid masculinities. Emerging at the turn of the millennium, hybrid masculinity theory has enjoyed a resurgence of focus as a critical counterpoint to inclusive masculinity. Like inclusive masculinity, this theory builds upon Connell’s original concept but highlights the ways in which masculinity adapts to different historical periods through the appropriation of subordinated ways of gender performance. In this formulation, new forms of masculinity found today represent a shift in the way power and inequality is enacted rather than the diminishment that Anderson argues.

This theory was first brought to light by Demetrakis Z. Demetriou (2001) in his article titled “Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique”. Demetriou finds Connell to be on the right path in her conception of masculinity but mistaken with her assessment of a somewhat rigid hegemonic masculine ideal. Demetriou (2001) argues that “hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice, but it is a hybrid

bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy” (337). He arrives at this conclusion by revisiting Antonio Gramsci’s original concept of hegemony and tweaking Connell’s subsequent theory to fit more closely with its source. Demetriou (2002) identifies both an implied internal and external hegemony at work in both theories. In the context of gender, internal hegemony is the domination of one group of men over others, while external hegemony is the domination of men over women. Where Connell and Gramsci part ways, is in their understanding of internal hegemony. Connell perceives internal hegemony as an elitist model “where subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model” (Demetriou 2001, 345). Gramsci on the other hand understands it as “essentially a dialectical one that involves reciprocity and mutual interaction between the class that is leading and the groups that are led” (Demetriou 2001, 345). Demetriou argues that rather than a rigid hegemonic ideal being formed in which all incompatible forms of masculinity are subordinated or marginalized, the hegemonic masculine bloc is an amorphous and adaptable construct that actively reshapes itself through the appropriation of subordinated styles of masculine performances. This process of appropriation is defined as “dialectical pragmatism” where masculinity “is in constant, mutual dialectical interaction with the allied groups and appropriates what appears pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment” (345). Thus, masculinity can be seen as a hybrid amalgamation of diverse forms of practice that can appear to be inclusive in its embrace of historically marginalized gender performances, but in reality, further entrenches patriarchal masculine domination.

Tristan Bridges and C. J. Pascoe (2014) provide a more contemporary take on hybrid masculinities. Building on Demetriou’s original formulation they analyse specific consequences of new hybridized forms of masculinities found today. They identify three main techniques and consequences of hybrid masculinities that allow men to renegotiate a dominant position in society while seemingly subverting traditional gender expectations. The first is “discursive distancing” (250). As feminist critique seeps into the cultural psyche, men begin to try and distance themselves from what is seen by many as a toxic form of hegemonic masculinity. However, this distance is often a superficial one where men are able to be seen as subverting gender rules while at the same time reinforcing them at a deeper

level. One example given is an anti-rape campaign directed at men, titled “My Strength is Not for Hurting” (251). The rhetoric behind this campaign “acts to distance men from hegemonic masculinity by framing men as a unitary group made to look bad by rapists . . . Non-rapist men are simultaneously aligned with hegemonic masculinity by framing “real” and “strong” men as fundamentally different from (presumably weak and unmanly) rapists” (251). Bridges and Pascoe argue that campaigns like this “discursively separate ‘good’ from ‘bad’ men and fail to account for the ways that representing strength and power as natural resources for men perpetuates gender and sexual inequality even as they are called into question” (251). The second technique Bridges and Pascoe identify is “strategic borrowing” (2014, 252). This builds upon Demetriou’s concept of dialectical pragmatism by examining contemporary motivations behind the appropriation of subordinated masculine identities. They write that, “[h]ybrid masculinities are often premised on the notion that the masculinities available to young, White, straight men are meaningless when compared with various ‘Others,’ whose identities were forged in struggles for rights and recognition” (252). By appropriating elements of minority masculinities, privileged men are able to “reframe themselves as symbolically part of socially subordinated groups” (252). This phenomenon allows men access to gender performances that are culturally validated amidst the growing social impetus placed upon critiques of power and privilege. One final consequence of hybrid masculinities is the fortification of boundaries between privileged masculinities and the rest of the world. Bridges and Pascoe (2014, 254) write:

By co-opting elements of style and performance from less powerful masculinities, young straight, White men’s hybridizations often obscure the symbolic and social boundaries between groups upon which such practices rely. Through this process, systems of inequality are further entrenched and concealed in historically new ways, often along lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Men today may take on gender roles in different ways, but this does not mean that they are losing their purchase on power. The adoption of diverse and ‘progressive’ ways of doing masculinity allow men to give the appearance of subverting gender inequality but in many ways simply transform the way that men exercise power. Furthermore, the ability for privileged men to adopt these diverse forms of gender performance often relies on the privilege they already have. Middle class, White, heterosexual men are given more freedom

to play with their gender presentation. Their access to higher education, and the freedom that having money allows, means that they have resources to perform diverse forms of masculinity through consumption and a privileged access to knowledge. Men who may have less access to privilege, due to economic or ethnic inequality, do not enjoy the same freedom. Messner (1993, 249) notes that in the context of hybrid masculinities, “men of color, working class men, immigrant men, among others, are often (in)directly cast as the possessors of regressive masculinities”.

Hybrid masculinity informs the approach taken in this research. Using this theory, I will critique inclusive masculinity by analyzing the actual consequences in recent shifts in men’s behavior. One main point of focus will be the idea that lived perception and experience of masculinity take place amid a culture that grants it the ability to adapt to the times while retaining its dominant social position.

2.3 Objectification

Objectification has emerged as a cornerstone to feminist critique of gender and inequality. A broad and nebulous concept, objectification has received countless evaluations and sparked heavy debate both within various feminist traditions and more generally in wider schools of philosophy. This thesis utilizes accounts of objectification as a lens through which to examine contemporary transformations in gender performance and gender inequality. Adopting this approach enables me to narrow the focus on some of the more widely read and discussed accounts of the term. I first cover a brief genealogy of objectification before arriving at Martha Nussbaum’s (1995, 258) “loose cluster” concept, which will be used as a basis for understanding the notion of objectification. I then turn to theories that examine aspects of objectification as gendered performances.

Immanuel Kant

One of the specific group or collective performances from my research findings that will be analyzed in this thesis concerns how men objectify women. Objectification entails “treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being” (Nussbaum 1995, 257). Eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant laid the groundwork for feminist analyses of objectification (Papadaki 2010). For Kant, what set humans apart

from animals or objects is the capacity for reason, free will, and the dignity that comes from these:

Man regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person . . . he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world (Kant 1991, 230)

Kant argues that to treat a human as an object, or a means to an end, is to attack the very quality that sets humanity apart from the rest of the world. Thus, objectification is inherently negative in its capacity to degrade the dignity through which a person is accorded respect. Concerning sexuality, Kant theorizes that sexual acts based on inclination rather than affection are a form of objectification:

In loving from sexual inclination, they make the person into an object of their appetite. As soon as the person is possessed, and the appetite sated, they are thrown away, as one throws away a lemon after sucking the juice from it (Kant 1997, 156)

Using a person as a tool to achieve gratification is, in Kant's view, detrimental to the respect, autonomy, and free will of the human being.

Radical Feminism

This version of the theory of objectification has been appropriated by feminist scholars, who wish to expose the pervasive effects of patriarchy on the female subject (Dworkin 2006; MacKinnon 1987). Translating Kantian ideas into gender politics, these writers narrow Kant's abstract philosophy into a discussion of the ways men exert their institutional power over women. Catherine MacKinnon discusses the link between Kantian philosophy and the objectification of women through media representations such as pornography. She writes that "[a] person, in one Kantian view, is a free and rational agent whose existence is an end in itself, as opposed to instrumental. In pornography, women exist to the end of male pleasure . . . Pornography purports to define what a woman is" (MacKinnon 1987, 158). Following this line of thinking, Andrea Dworkin (2000, 30-31) proposes that the

oppression of women occurs through subordination . . . [S]ubordination is objectification. Objectification occurs when a human being, through social means, is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When objectification occurs, a person is depersonalized, so that no individuality or integrity is available socially . . . Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination: those who can be used as if they are not fully human are no longer fully human in social terms; their humanity is hurt by being diminished.

These writers unravel the intimate relationship between gender, power, and objectification. Objectification, for these thinkers, is a tool of the patriarchy used to keep women under the heel of men by holding power over the way women are represented and labelled. It is so strongly embedded in a rhetoric of gender inequality that objectification, echoing Kant, is perceived as inherently negative. Furthermore, it is particularly gendered act that is always committed by men against women (Papadaki 2010). These thinkers have been celebrated as influential but are also criticized for being too narrow in their approach to objectification by a range of more contemporary feminist theorists (Langton 2009, Nussbaum 1995, Papadaki 2010).

Martha Nussbaum

In this thesis, I will argue that objectification is not a natural instinctive drive, but a gendered performance aimed at benefitting both a man's subjective perception of himself and his status within the group he seeks to establish validation. To discuss this topic, I will be drawing substantially from Martha Nussbaum's (1995) essay "Objectification". Nussbaum (1995, 257) theorizes a limited typology of sexual objectification:

1. Instrumentality: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also activity.
4. Fungibility: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.

5. Violability: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. Denial of subjectivity: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

Rae Langton (2009, 228-229) has extended this list to include:

8. Reduction to body: one treats it as identified with its body, or body parts.
9. Reduction to appearance: one treats it primarily in terms of how it looks, or how it appears to the senses.
10. Silencing: one treats it as silent, lacking the capacity to speak.

Using these themes Nussbaum undertakes an in-depth critical analysis of important literary works in which differing forms of objectification takes place. An important takeaway observation from her findings is that objectification can occur in a multitude of ways that, at times, may look entirely different from one another. Objectification, for Nussbaum, is a “relatively loose cluster-term” (Nussbaum 1995, 258) that defies attempts of narrow definition. In this sense, Nussbaum posits that any instance of objectification could contain one or any number of the features listed above in any and every possible combination. She proposes this due to the many ways in which a thing or an object can be treated. For example, a ballpoint pen would often be treated with all the features above (with the exception of violability while it is still working), while a Monet painting is not treated as fungible being a unique piece of art, and its boundary integrity is sacrosanct given how precious of an object it is. Likewise, treatment of a person as an object comes in many forms. Children are often objectified along the lines of a denial of autonomy and subjectivity, and in some sense a claim of temporary ownership. However, children are not often treated as instrumental or violable, and when they are it raises massive moral concerns that are often guarded against through the legal system (Nussbaum 1995, 262). The key dynamic here could be read as the denial of autonomy given Western attitudes to children's capacity to think and act for themselves. A Marxian approach to workers under

capitalism can see objectification happening in alternative ways. Instrumentality defines this type of objectification where workers are the means by which employers can generate wealth. Through this process unskilled laborers are treated as fungible and easily replaceable, have a very low level of subjectivity appealed to, and, though not slaves, are treated with a sense of ownership through contractual obligations. However, workers capacity for being instrumental relies on their ability to act; thus, inertness would be antithetical to the use-value that they represent for their employers. Here we see two forms of objectification that share some similarities but appear very different to one another. Children are denied autonomy and at some level denied subjectivity, both due to societal norms but also out of concern for their well-being, which could be damaged if left to their own devices. Workers, on the other hand, are not cared for in the same way, and thus are objectified mainly for their instrumental use-value.

While Papadaki (2010) criticizes Nussbaum's approach as too vague, Nussbaum's rendering of objectification considerably broadens its application to gendered performance. Nussbaum remains receptive to Kantian and radical feminist ideas but takes a step back from the narrow focus on negative instrumental treatment of women to showcase how nuanced and complicated the concept can be. A controversial notion in Nussbaum's work is the idea that objectification is not an inherently negative phenomenon. Nussbaum (1995, 251) posits that "[s]ome features of objectification . . . may in fact in some circumstances . . . be either necessary or even wonderful features of sexual life. Seeing this will require, among other things, seeing how the allegedly impossible combination between (a form of) objectification and "equality, respect, and consent" might after all be possible." This is a radical departure from previous thinking that holds that any form of objectification is necessarily attached to aspects of domination, subordination, and control. Reimagining objectification in this light both serves to broaden the concept, but also runs the risk of diluting the political power that the term has in agitating for gender equality and feminist activism.

My research expands on these ideas and applies them to real life performances of masculinity. Following Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity, I argue that objectification is a crucial aspect of constructing one's own masculine identity. Of these types of objectification, the most important to my analysis is 'instrumentality.' My research

explores how objectification is not only used to demean or subjugate women, but to also increase one's status in the group to which one belongs, or seeks to belong, at the cost of the women objectified.

2.4 Applications of Objectification

Objectification theory

My research will also take a wider look at the implications of objectification and the ways in which it can affect the psychological well-being of those who endure it. Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Anne Roberts (1997) have created 'objectification theory' for this very purpose. They propose that "the most profound effect of objectifying treatment is that it coaxes girls and women to adopt a peculiar view of self. Objectification theory posits that the cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated" (1997, 177). A culture of objectification leads to a self-objectification of those under scrutiny. These women suffer from a number of psychological consequences due to their objectification. Three of these are important to my study: shame, anxiety, and peak motivational states. Shame works "to inhibit or change that which fails to live up to the person's internally or externally derived standards" (1997, 181). Shame is laden with morality as it "is used to socialize societal standards" (1997, 182). In this sense, women who feel shame often change themselves by adopting particular traits to try and conform to cultural norms which can have side effects of body dysmorphia and eating disorders (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, 182). Shame also leads women to avoid objectifying gazes, often leading to a disinclination to engage in public interactions and a desire to "disappear . . . alongside feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, 181). Women suffer from anxiety when a culture rife with sexual objectification "presents women with a continuous stream of anxiety-provoking experiences, requiring them to maintain an almost chronic vigilance both to their physical appearance and to their physical safety" (1997, 183). Anxiety drives women to be hyper-aware of their objectification and the attention given to them publicly. This goes much further than body consciousness in the aesthetic sense though, it creates a psychological state of near constant vigilance against threats to their physical safety. The internalization of objectification also affects women's peak motivational states (Fredrickson

& Roberts 1997, 183). The effects of objectification challenge women's ability to achieve a clear mental flow where they can voluntarily apply themselves to thought processes that require high levels of attention, focus, and engagement. The hyper-awareness and anxiety caused by objectification derails or impedes attempts to focus intently on one thing due to there always being some level of self-consciousness that bifurcates the attention.

Later applications of objectification theory mainly focus narrowly on how women are induced into self-criticism and self-objectification. With the recent rise of objectifying images of men in multiple forms of media (Bordo 1999), it can now be argued that men have been roped into a late-capitalist culture of objectification. A few studies have attempted to study how men are affected by cultures of objectification (Gervais *et al.* 2011; Hebl *et al.* 2004; Martins *et al.* 2007). Many of these studies note that some sense of similar phenomena can be observed amongst men's self-perception. However, for the most part, heterosexual men are relatively unaffected by cultures of objectification while there seems to be a much more powerful effect upon queer men (Gervais *et al.* 2011; Hebl *et al.* 2004; Martins *et al.* 2007). This discrepancy in gendered experiences of objectification will be analyzed. I will argue that men also feel an objectifying gaze centered on ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which in turn drives men to adopt particular traits to try and conform to the ideal type of man. However, while awareness of objectification exists, heterosexual men do not appear to experience negative consequences to the same depth and degree as women.

Objectification as tool of masculinity and power

Men have developed a wide variety of tools in which to negotiate their place both within the masculine order, and within the wider field of gender. This thesis takes a keen interest in how men utilize objectification as a performative act in which to secure hegemonic positions within homosocial environments. The motivation behind objectification is varied for men. To some degree it is a pleasing act of voyeurism in which men receive a personal sense of sexual gratification legitimized by the privileged position of power men have over women. In many other ways it is a tool in which men reproduce said privilege and status within society, both over women and over other men. Much research focuses on the experience of women on the receiving end of objectification; however, the

subjective account of how men experience objectification as the objectifier remains relatively understudied. Michael Kimmel (2005, 33), following from Connell's work, identifies a strong aspect of masculine performance as being a "homosocial enactment". This entails how masculinity is most carefully managed to give the best possible impression to other men:

[Men] are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance . . . Masculinity is a homosocial enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood (Kimmel 2005, 33).

In this sense, men live in a constant state of fear that their masculine persona will be seen through and perceived as a performance rather than an 'innate' or 'organic' state. Masculinity is thus a performance mainly directed at other men who are both our biggest rivals and our most valued validators. Within these homosocial environments, Kimmel (2005, 33) writes that women "become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale." This informs our approach to investigating the ways in which men objectify women to navigate their way in the masculine pecking order.

One particularly cogent application of this is Beth A. Quinn's (2002) examination of "girl watching" in professional workplace settings. She argues that often in the case of sexual objectification, the interactive element is not between the objectifying man and the objectified woman, but rather between groups of men. In this sense objectification "functions as a form of gendered play among men. This play is productive of masculine identities and premised on a studied lack of empathy with the feminine other . . . [M]en understand the targeted woman to be an object rather than a player in the game" (Quinn 2002, 391). A woman's presence is necessary to the performance of objectification; however, this presence is purely as an object and thus her subjectivity and participation is not required, and perhaps even deleterious to men's enjoyment of the act. Empathy, or lack thereof, emerges as a key quality in men's ability and drive to objectify women. Hegemonic masculine ideals require men to quell moral concerns about behavior, often in the form of ignoring and trivializing the potentially damaging effects they can have on women. This causes a vicious circle in which men "fail to exhibit empathy with women because

masculinity precludes them from taking the position of the feminine other, and men's moral stance vis-à-vis women is attenuated by this lack of empathy" (Quinn 2002, 397). Quinn's article succinctly explores how objectification can emerge as homosocial gendered play, and that due to its playful nature it is often trivialized as harmless fun (Quinn 2002, 387). The crux of the issue is that objectification operates as a "powerful site of gendered social action" in which men forge both personal and collective identities revolving around hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Quinn 2002, 394). My research will look into examples of this kind of behavior, and the ways in which men can subvert these common tropes in various ways.

Viewing objectification as a tool of power and domination opens up an investigation of the links between violence and objectification. This involves looking at two different forms of violence and how objectification is implicated in them. The first and simpler form of violence is the common understanding of physical and bodily harm. Everyday objectification, at least at the level this research engages with, does not entail a violent act in this context. However, cultures of objectification have been positively linked to escalating acts of physical violence that are easier to commit when perpetrators view the victim as less than human (Gervais et al. 2014, Gervais et al. 2017). Following Johan Galtung's (1990) theory of violence, this can be seen as a form of structural or cultural violence. In this sense, looking at the data analyzed throughout this thesis, the actions and behaviors described do not involve direct violence but facilitate structural aspects of society that enforce inequality which has a by-product of inflicting direct forms of violence upon women. This is most keenly addressed in theories of rape culture where normalized activities such as objectification carry wider implications in the legitimizing of violence against women (Attenborough 2014; Sills *et al.* 2016; Walsh 2015).

2.5 Empathy

How does empathy play into gendered interaction and the breaking down of barriers between different groups? Empathy has been touted widely as a dominant factor in the development of considerate and compassionate perspectives toward others, and a guiding force behind prosocial behavior (Batson *et al.* 2002). Empathy, in regard to gender, masculinity, and objectification is a complicated matter. To explore the matter in depth, I

suggest looking at different aspects at play when it comes to the development and implementation of empathy as a learned behavior and attitude with which we can deconstruct social institutions and structures that benefit from the erasure of people's suffering.

In the common vernacular, empathy is often understood as taking another's perspective to gain in-depth understanding of how they think and feel, or as the saying goes – to put yourself in their shoes. In this thesis, I argue against this popular conception and contend that we need to move away from a focus achieving a comprehensive role-taking of another's perspective and move toward conceiving empathy as an ability to emotionally respond to another's position, without necessarily being able to or needing to obtain a strong subjective knowledge of said position.

A quick foray into academic work on the topic of empathy supplies one with innumerable definitions and terms, epistemological approaches, and very little consensus. Given the brief nature of this research I take a narrow approach to empathy using a definition that can be operationalized for the purpose of nurturing feminist attitudes in men. Daniel Batson *et al.* (2002) define empathy as “an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else” (486). To build on the argument presented in this thesis, I highlight two aspects to this definition of empathy. First, is an interpersonal awareness that can rouse “empathic emotions” such as compassion and sympathy (Batson *et al.* 2002, 486). Second, it is a response focused on the “perceived welfare” of another person and appropriate to the situation at hand.² Batson *et al.* (2002) argue against cognitive conceptions of empathy that focus on perspective taking or role projection that aim at gaining in-depth insight into another's emotional frame of mind. This approach is a useful base when trying to understand the difficulties and possibilities when it comes to building empathetic relationships between social groups where differences and boundaries of experience complicate understanding each other's experiences. I propose that we can augment this with a limited appeal to cognitive understandings of other's experiences. Dialogue and communication between barriers of difference that serve to give

² i.e., an emotional response more likely to be comforting or supportive rather than unlikely to causing further distress or confusion for the person. For instance, if someone was to be experiencing grief and I responded with concern or sorrow it would cause little social dissonance. However, if I responded with an expression of mirth or terror it would likely be of little comfort to the griever.

us greater awareness of their lived reality can be powerful tools here. Rather than attempting to gain direct access to another's perspective, my aim in this thesis was to facilitate dialogue and communication that emphasized non-judgmental openness to differences in experience. This is supported by various social scientists who highlight the healing and transformative effect that such dialogue can have and is consistent with phenomenological analysis (deTurk 2001; Shaw 2011).

Chapter 3. Methodology

This study undertakes a phenomenological study of masculinity using qualitative methods to unearth subjective accounts of how masculinity and objectification are experienced and how themes of hegemonic masculinity are enacted in everyday activity. Paying attention to both the personal narrative, and the implications of these in more structural terms, this study proposes that the state of masculinity today is a complicated and often contradictory mix of traditional masculine ideals along with newer 'softer' forms of performing masculinity in the contemporary milieu. I work towards an understanding of masculinity as being 'hybridized' in which men often adopt subversive performances of masculinity that appeal to feminist rhetoric while concurrently creating problematic new trends that work to re-establish men's dominance in society. The aim of this article is to undertake an in-depth critique of the new masculine milieu framed largely within the theme of objectification, and to sift through the detritus to try and identify what has changed and in what ways these changes can be either seen as positively or negatively affecting advances towards gender equality. To do this I ask: why do men objectify? How do they justify or critique this phenomenon? What ramifications do these have on men and women? And finally, are things changing for the better?

This section will cover: the phenomenological and methodological approach of interpretive phenomenological analysis, the epistemic position of feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledge, methods and details of analysis conducted, and the limitations and complications experienced in the carrying out of my research.

3.1 Phenomenology

This research takes a phenomenological approach to masculinity and objectification, specifically utilizing the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology as proposed by Jonathan A. Smith (2004). The broad goal of phenomenology is the "direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions" (Spiegelberg 1975, 3). Phenomenology has been extensively reworked into multiple avenues of enquiry about consciousness and perception, so it is necessary to lay out the specific approach I take in line with the framework laid out by IPA. IPA borrows from

various philosophers to construct its approach. Edmund Husserl, who established the phenomenological tradition, envisioned phenomenology as a descriptive method of investigating “how the world is formed and experienced through consciousness” (Eatough & Smith 2017, 194). Husserl’s approach involved a phenomenological reduction in which one was to put aside, or bracket, preconceptions and prejudices when investigating a subject. This enables the phenomenologist to gain an arguably objective understanding of how people consciously experience the world, unfiltered by their own experiences and life history. Such a method works by “exposing the taken-for-granted and revealing the essence of the phenomenon whilst transcending the contextual and personal” (Eatough & Smith 2017, 194). IPA is influenced by Husserl but differs in its approach. Husserl’s formulation of phenomenology as a philosophical and scientific method entails a purely descriptive endeavor, one in which detailed description of phenomena takes priority over interpretation and analysis. IPA takes a more hermeneutic and interpretive approach to the analysis of research findings. Description remains important, but IPA shifts the focus to “how this process sheds light on experiences as they are lived by an embodied socio-historical situated person”. IPA’s focus on the interpretive side of theory relies less on attempting to achieve a phenomenological reduction and more toward using reflexivity to make clear how positionality and standpoint can affect the researcher’s interpretations.

3.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory

I undertook a phenomenological approach to my research that was aimed at the interpretation of experiential modes of understanding the world as perceived by the participants. In so doing, I follow the epistemological framework of situated knowledges and feminist standpoint theory to understand how this knowledge is created. Feminist standpoint theory (FST) has carved out an important place within the social sciences. Beginning as a critique of idealized notions of objectivity and value-free research, FST emerged as a staple model of feminist epistemology and methodology that conceives of historically dispossessed or marginalized peoples as having a privileged perspective when critiquing the inequality that they experience (Harding 1991). A standpoint is a perspective that utilizes marginalized positions to cast a critical eye from a vantage point that can identify contradictions that expose inequality in society.

FST relies on the idea of situated knowledge. This proposes that “the researcher, through a conscious reflection of her or his situatedness and her or his research technologies, can obtain a partially objective knowledge, that is, a knowledge of the specific part of reality that she or he can ‘see’ from the position in which she or he is materially discursively located in time, space, body and historical power relations” (Lykke 2010, 5). It is my belief that feminist studies of masculinity carried out by men would benefit from a greater emphasis on self-reflection and reflexivity throughout the research process. Rather than assuming an objective role, we should be actively critiquing the ways in which gender politics effect men’s lives, and the ways in which men obtain privilege and entitlement through gender inequality, by contextualizing our own lived experiences within the research. Emphases on reflexivity, positionality, situatedness, and self-reflection is an established theme in feminist literature (Haraway 1988; Nencel 2014; Stapele 2014). Gender issues, such as sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, etc., are ingrained in society. By deconstructing these social constructs, while remaining self-aware and reflective, we can begin to try and unravel the ways these constructs have affected the way we act. This leads to research that does more than simply state how society works. It leads to greater emphasis on how to subvert the norms and values at a subjective level, or at least provide a framework through which we could begin to practice subversion. Furthermore, I do not want to separate myself from the study of masculinity. By analyzing my own lived experience, I can navigate between critiquing and criticizing masculinity, without placing myself beyond reproach.

FST shares many features of critical theory: a focus on empowering the oppressed; raising collective consciousness; deconstructing networks of power that continue to reinforce inequality over many aspects of society. Critical theory provides a good outline of the ontological assumptions I take when conducting research. Guba and Lincoln (1994, 110) describe the ontology of critical theory to be one of historical realism:

A reality is assumed to be apprehendable [sic] that was once plastic, but that was, over time, shaped by a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, and then crystallized into a series of structures that are now (inappropriately) taken as “real,” that is, natural and immutable. For all practical purposes the structures are “real,” a virtual or historical reality.

Taking a cue from Guba and Lincoln (1994), I approach gender as a construct that, through a historical process, has reified into something that has the appearance of reality. Gender is a social construct that has amassed enough cultural value and impetus to have a very real effect on the lives of individuals. My epistemological approach sees knowledge as created in a “transactional and subjectivist” sense (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 110). This sees the “investigator and the investigated object . . . [as] interactively linked, with the values of the investigator . . . inevitably influencing the inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 110). Thus, knowledge gained throughout the research is not purely objective, but rather value-mediated. These ontological and epistemological assumptions guide my methodological approach. Guba and Lincoln (1994, 110) describe critical theory methodology as

[d]ialogic and dialectical. This supposes that “inquiry requires a dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of inquiry . . . [D]ialogue must be dialectical in nature to transform misapprehensions (accepted historically mediated structures as immutable) into more informed consciousness (seeing how the structures might be changed comprehending the actions required to effect change).

The dialogic and dialectical nature of my methodology will see my role as researcher as a “transformative intellectual” (Giroux, quoted in Guba & Lincoln 1994, 110) in two senses. First, to conduct research with real political potency that can help strengthen movements for social change. Second, to hopefully have my participants, through our dialogue, come away from the research with a wider knowledge, awareness, and empathy toward gender issues prevalent today. These methodological principles inform my choice of qualitative research method.

Sprague (2018) suggests four general guidelines that I follow which serve to manage the potentially damaging impact that relations of power, specifically my gender identity, can have on the research process. First, that feminist research “[w]orks from the standpoint of the disadvantaged” (Sprague 2018, 50). Sprague acknowledges that much of the most influential emancipatory and empowering theory has come from those whom the work aims to benefit, but also that sometimes they have been written by those who occupy privileged social locations that benefit from the very inequality that they wish to dismantle. She suggests that “transformations in social science knowledge have occurred *not because of the changing identity of the scholars, but because scholars have been shifting the*

standpoints from which they develop scholarship” (Sprague 2018, 50, emphasis in original).

Thus, the objective of feminist research is not to limit oneself to researching only to those within their own social locations, but to approach the topic of study by incorporating theory produced by and for the subjects that suffer the most from the topics’ effects. Sprague notes further that working from a standpoint of privilege is possible but must have some focus on destabilizing social structures and relations that propagate inequality and examining the consequences that one’s own privilege has upon others. One way in which a privileged researcher can undertake feminist research is to “analyses the circumstances and practices that support their privilege, for example, by examining their own biography from the standpoint of those over whom they have privilege” (Sprague 2018, 51). A second guideline suggested by Sprague (2018, 51) is to base interpretations in “experiences and interests”. These are suggestions that I put considerable weight on when approaching this thesis. I address these concerns by:

- Basing my understanding of sexism, misogyny, and objectification from feminist accounts that themselves use lived experiences of women as a crucial factor in creating theory.
- While my focus is on masculinity and men’s performance and experience of objectification, the majority of my work uses data gained in a focus group with women as the prime source of what the consequences of men’s behavior can be when it concerns women. I compare and contrast men’s perceptions of their actions with women’s perceptions of men’s actions and take the women’s account as the having more epistemic authority over the reality of how objectification negatively impacts their lives.
- I incorporate an in-depth critical analysis of my own thoughts, life experiences, and participation in the research process as a key source of data in how masculinity and objectification is understood, performed, and experienced.

Through this I hope to explore what it means to be actively practicing feminism from a masculine perspective. Inspired by Sandra Bartky’s (1975) article, “Towards a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness”, I hope to develop a rough framework of what an experiential phenomenology of feminist consciousness might look like through the lived experience of men. Amongst other goals, this thesis hopes to lay out a masculine feminist

consciousness that complements women's feminist experience, while altering its focus accordingly due to men's positionality within the matrix of gender relations. One intention of this is to begin a debate around feminist standpoint theory and the possibility of a masculine standpoint within feminist critique. Adhering closely to the premise that feminist theory should begin with women's experience to "generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (Harding 1993, 56), I believe this can be complemented from a reflective and critical self-evaluation practiced by men that can help shed light on how and why men are motivated to engage in and reproduce systems of inequality.

This idea has received little focused attention in debates around feminism and studies of masculinity.³ It should be noted that I am wary of claiming a sound theory due to the many ways in which this might promote more androcentric modes of thought in a field that actively resists them. Nevertheless, I believe that by promoting these ideas we can begin to interpolate men into a more active and self-aware form of feminist activism rather than standing idly by.

3.3 Methods

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted to gather data. The first of these (FG1) was conducted prior to the commencement of my Master of Art's research, during my 2016 Honors year and is constituted of seven masculine friends of mine. Two more masculine focus groups (FG2 and FG3) composed of established friend groups were conducted last year (2017) and were targeted more specifically to my interest in objectification. One final focus group (FG4), conducted in 2017, contained only women and sought to obtain a perspective of objectification and masculinity as experienced by those who are often most directly affected. Six in-depth interviews with participants from the focus groups were initially planned, but this method was abandoned upon completion of two interviews that yielded little relevant data.

³ Some salient exceptions are found in writers such as Jeff Hearn (2004), Bob Pease (2006), and Malcolm Cowburn (2007).

FG1 consisted of seven of my heterosexual male friends, aged between 18 and 30, and constituted the bulk of my analysis in my Honors project which this thesis builds upon. The participants, and I, all have an established friendship with each other. This fostered a comfortable atmosphere, conducive to the flow of discussion. More importantly, because of this established relationship, the participants have all discussed aspects of masculinity directly or indirectly over the course of their friendship. This provided well thought-out and coherent perspectives, as well as recollections on masculinity.

FG2 and FG3 were recruited through advertisement on Facebook, in which one participant responded and subsequently gathered a group of friends to join. The only limitations set upon these focus groups were that participants were male and aged between 18 and 30. Both of these focus groups contained five participants. FG2 had three heterosexual and two bisexual participants. FG3 all identified as heterosexual. Both of these focus groups were conducted in ways to emulate the atmosphere and structure of FG1 in an attempt to achieve homogeneity across multiple data sets.

An aspect of these three focus groups was not to simply analyse what is said but to analyse how the participants talk about masculinity with each other. Following Butler's (1990) focus on gender as performative and heavily based in interaction, I paid close attention to the way the participants talk with each other. During each focus group the participants both talked about masculinity and performed masculinity at the same time. Thus, I was able to gain insight both into their perceptions of masculinity and the way they perform it.

To follow the guiding principle of rigorous reflexivity and self-reflection that I aimed to achieve throughout this thesis, I was directly involved both as facilitator and participant in FG1, FG2, and FG3. My role as researcher was that of a "[c]omplete Member [where the] researcher studies a group in which he or she is or has been active and reveals his or her role as a researcher" (Leckie 2008, 774). I collected data about what the participants talked about and actively engaged in discussion too. I kept a diary of my personal reflections of the focus group to allow for a reflexive analysis of myself alongside the participants. These focus groups followed a very loosely structured format aimed at being more of an informal than guided discussion of masculinity. The informality of the focus groups is important for two

reasons. First, I expected responses and discussion around masculinity to be somewhat stunted or formulated to fit with what they considered my expectations to be. By providing an environment as close to an informal gathering of friends such as found at a dinner party, or similar social gatherings, I believe that the participants were relaxed enough to engage in discussion without fear of saying the 'wrong' thing. Second, I wanted conversation to flow naturally, as I wanted to analyse the interaction between participants. By allowing much of the focus group to be participant led, I was able to gain interesting insights into the ways the participants manage their masculinity around each other. To collect the data, I recorded the entire discussion and transcribed relevant parts after its completion.

FG4 was made up of five women aged between 18 and 30. Of these participants, four identified as heterosexual and one identified as queer. This group was aimed at gathering data from women about the effects of masculinity and objectification upon women's lives. I necessarily took a more removed position due to my gender, taking a relatively passive role by limiting my participation to asking questions, facilitating discussion, and prompting participants to talk further on certain subjects. At the same time, I invited the women to ask questions of me, personal or otherwise, if they wanted to hear a "masculine" perspective or experience of topics that came up in discussion. This was to both an attempt to acknowledge and mitigate my somewhat obtrusive masculine presence, and to allow myself to periodically enter the discussion as a participant. This group was loosely structured, much like the first three groups, with an even bigger emphasis on the participant led aspect which allowed the women to actively guide the discussion wherever they wished.

3.4 Analysis

Upon completion of the focus groups, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was conducted upon the data gathered. This approach focuses a "personal perception or account of an object or event as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith *et al.* 1999, 218). Thus, my analysis is aimed at the participants' reflection and interpretation of personal experiences. The role of the researcher in IPA is understood as one that cannot directly access a participant's thoughts, instead a dual interpretive process or double hermeneutic was conducted where I attempt "to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world" (Braun & Clarke 2013,

181). To do this, I both try to represent the participants' accounts in a way that is 'true' of their understanding, while at the same time critically analyzing these accounts from a more removed position to connect them with broader themes in social theory (Braun & Clarke 2013, 181). At the completion of each focus group, all data was transcribed and subsequently coded to identify themes. I took an inductive approach toward analyzing the data sets that, although lightly guided by the general preconceived research topic, saw theory being "created" by the data rather than fitting it to a pre-established notion.

The combination of focus groups and phenomenological research is controversial and requires some justification. Focus groups have been considered incompatible with phenomenology by some critics (Webb & Kevern 2001). Due to phenomenology's focus on individual personal experience and thought, the group dynamic of a focus group is perceived as hindering or contaminating this due to the presence of other people swaying what people are willing to discuss. I believe that, contrary to this criticism, focus groups in this context were helpful in promoting honest and open discussions of personal experience. In response to the criticism of focus groups in IPA and general phenomenological studies, some have argued that they can be a potentially beneficial method in the right contexts (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2008). Focus groups allow for personal disclosure when grounded in a supportive setting that promotes solidarity. This is tentatively supported by IPA's founder, Jonathan A. Smith (2004, 50-51), who urges caution and attention to group dynamics that potentially inhibit disclosure but suggests that focus groups can possibly draw out greater disclosure in certain contexts. Sue Wilkinson (1998) supports this explaining that the risk of contamination is over-emphasized, and that group support can facilitate greater emotional disclosure while at the same time giving us important insight into the co-construction of meaning in group contexts.

The recruitment of friend groups was first conceived of to focus on interactional elements between members. However, upon completion of data gathering this interactive element was deemed as lacking in worthy data to facilitate a worthwhile interactional analysis. While this was a small setback, it quickly became clear that the friend group environment created a space where participants felt comfortable discussing intimate and personal aspects of their lives due to the supportive and outwardly non-judgmental attitudes of members of the group. Thus, my approach was shifted to focus more directly on

personal accounts with the interactional element of the focus group helping more to steer the conversation into different terrains of topic and providing supplementary roads of enquiry. Interaction was not entirely ignored given the ability of focus groups to provide insight into collaborative construction of meaning; however, the most valuable data obtained was found in extended moments of speech and disclosure by individual participants.

To analyze the data, I followed the loose IPA framework presented by Smith and Osborn (2007). I transcribed FG2, FG3, and FG4 verbatim including inflections, interjections, and environmental interferences. Upon completion I read through a printed copy multiple times, making notes and highlighting points of interest. When I felt I had a good understanding of the transcripts, I coded the data into subsections of potential interest, gradually whittling down the themes until I was cognizant of directions I could take. FG2 and FG3 were analyzed in close succession before I conducted FG4. FG4 was conducted after the analysis of FG2 and FG3, so I could remain aware of themes that came up with the first three focus groups that I could discuss with the women to gain an outside perspective. Thus, when I analyzed the data from FG4 I had a clearer preconception of what I was looking for. Although I still approached it with the same method, I could not claim I was completely inductive in my analysis as I was actively looking for certain themes alongside documenting any other general ones that I came across.

FG1 was undertaken in 2016 and was my first foray into focus group transcription. Thus, there were some minor differences to how I approached the 2017 groups. My 2016 transcription was selective rather than completed in full. I also had no clear methodological framework in my initial data analysis for my previous Honors project. I analyzed the data again with the same methods that I used for the 2017 focus groups and found little difference in what came up as important information. It is possible this is due to already having a preconceived notion before I reread the transcript. Having said that, I do not believe that it affects the direction of this research in any significant way.

3.5 Limitations

Due to the advertising on the social media website, Facebook, many of the participants were known to me beforehand as initial respondents were Facebook friends of

mine. Therefore, it must be entertained that the data may have been affected by this relationship. I do not believe that this factored into the data I obtained, and in fact, a level of familiarity lent a more open and honest atmosphere to the discussion due to the comfortability gained through personal knowledge of each other. This also applies to the focus group conducted with my own personal group of friends.

As previously discussed, the recruitment of friendship groups in this study appeared to be conducive to the erosion of barriers when the participants discussed personal topics. Most participants were at ease with each other during the sessions and did not seem to hold back on self-disclosure. They were open with sharing personal aspects of themselves even when they attached shame or embarrassment to particular topics. However, it must be considered that the presence of their friends may have stunted or affected the way they presented themselves.

Recruiting my own circle of friends raises the same issues discussed above, and further issues relating to the dynamic of the research process. The existence of a prior relationship ran the risk of creating awkwardness or tension during and after the focus group. While a valid consideration when conducting qualitative research of this kind, there were no apparent issues raised within our group of friends. In fact, many of the participants suggested that they felt a stronger connection or bond with each other due to the focus group creating a space where people were expected to talk about issues that do not come up in normal conversation. This sentiment was echoed in all the focus groups – one or more participants would remark that opportunities to have in depth discussions with each other about the topics raised were rare, and that they felt the environment of the focus group allowed them to share and listen in ways that would usually be uncomfortable or taboo. Using friends as participants has risks, but in this case, I believe the benefits outweighed the negatives.

My identity and presence as a man could likewise have affected the discussion in FG4. It is possible that the women felt uncomfortable discussing certain topics with a man at the table with them. Upon completion of FG4 I feel it was apparent that this was not much of an issue as the discussion moved into areas of hostility towards men and very personal and traumatic experiences. My presence did not seem to make them uncomfortable that

they might offend me, say the wrong thing, or discuss any topics they felt may be awkward to engage in with a man at the table. The issue of power in qualitative research has been a concern in feminist discussions of ethical methodologies (Oakley 1981; Wilkinson 1998). Qualitative data runs the risk of being exploitative when the researcher retains a strong level of control over the direction of the discussion, imposes their preconceived framework of meaning upon the participants, and is reticent in self-disclosure toward the participants (Wilkinson 1998, 114). Wilkinson (1998) acknowledges that focus groups can help shift the balance of power over to the participants especially when they are from a homogenous group. During this focus group, the women demonstrated a level of security in disclosure due to the proximity of their friends. I attempted to increase the power of participants by allowing conversation to flow in an organic and self-directed manner, interjecting to change direction only when conversation had stalled or digressed off topic. I tried to be as open as I could be without taking over the conversation and was sure to disclose information about myself when relevant. Furthermore, I made clear at the start that I was aware of my presence as a man facilitating a women's focus group raised a few issues in regard to gender dynamics and relations of power inherent in the topic we were to discuss. I made a statement at the very beginning that they had full reign to ask me any questions, no matter how personal, so as to address my involvement or experience with any topic that came up. This was a symbolic exchange of power that allowed the women to know that I was ready to be held accountable, and willing to engage in critical self-reflection at their guidance. Whether this was successful is unclear as the women did not ask me many personal questions that I felt any hesitation or awkwardness in discussing. If nothing else, I believe this helped build an environment where it was clear that the women were in charge.

An initial intention in my approach was to contrast focus group discussion with semi-structured, dyadic interviews to analyze differing responses and gender performances of men in and out of homosocial environments. This approach proved to be fruitless, and upon completion of two interviews, the interview idea was discontinued due to a lack of useful data. I hoped to remedy this by conducting a focus group composed of gay men to gather a wider array of usable data that could add another layer onto the research. This subsequently fell through due to logistical issues and time constraints. In the end, I decided

to give more emphasis to elements of autoethnographic self-reflection to make up for the loss of data.

3.6 Ethics

All methods of data collection and analysis were cleared by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (Ethics approval no. 23020, 2016; 24801, 2017).

Informed consent was acquired from all participants who were given information sheets explaining the general overview of my research, what their rights were, and what I planned to do with the data. I clarified that any data gained during the focus group could not be withdrawn (within reason), due to the fact that the focus group conversation is a co-constructed narrative. I read through the participant information sheet with each focus group and explained the significance of the consent process to them, allowing for questions and queries. After this, each participant signed consent forms. All relevant forms are included in the appendices at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 4. 'Taniwhas' & 'Dons': The Sexual Objectification of Women Through the Use of Code Words

Introduction

The following analysis is centered on a focus group conducted during my Honors research consisting of one of my own personal circle of friends (FG1). Our friendship was developed during my time of employment at a particular establishment including both co-workers and other men who were either introduced through patronizing this place of work, or were friends with particular employees previously and subsequently welcomed into the fold. The behavior and experiences of this group of friends at this particular time were what inspired my interest in objectification as a homosocial practice. This analysis uses data obtained during FG1, alongside my personal reflections, and applies Martha Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification to tease out underlying meaning and nuances to our group behavior. This chapter examines our use of code words to signify and call attention to the presence of attractive women. I will go through Nussbaum's seven types of objectification one by one and explore how our behavior potentially damages the subjectivity, autonomy, and agency of the targeted women, while at the same time promotes our masculine prowess and position within an enclosed homosocial system. This chapter proposes that objectification is often a "homosocial enactment" (Kimmel 2005, 33) in which men use objectifying language or behavior towards women as a performance for the express approval of our masculine audience who in turn grant us status within the matrix of hegemonic masculinity.

Context

Sam: I definitely check out women

Frank: Yeah, "dons." The word "Taniwha." We come up with code words

Dan: Yeah, we've literally come up with code words so that people don't know that we're objectifying them.

One of the most noticeable aspects of our sexual objectification of women was the use of code words to point out attractive women to other members of the group. This has been an ongoing practice within our group of friends, who have all participated to varying degrees. 'Taniwha' was the first word I can recall being in circulation and, with a few in

between, we now use 'don' as a code word for women. This practice involves one person spotting an attractive woman, calling out the code word loud enough for others to hear, and then the rest of the group in turn appraising the target. When asked in what context we utilize these words, there was a strong agreement that it was around "the boys." All participants agreed that the use of code words was not something we did by ourselves. It was only when around other men who were in on the fold that we vocalized our attraction to other women in this way. Dan explained it as a "group mentality, a pack of males' thing. You get encouraged by other males to think like that and then you do think like that." Mike explained that we only do it around other men because we "get . . . validation of your sexual abilities when you do it." The responses from participants showed that this performance of objectification was not aimed first and foremost toward women, but rather to other men as a "homosocial enactment" (Kimmel 2005, 33). Using code words such as these is a performative utterance, a tool used to enact, prove and cement our masculinity to other men.

Following Martha Nussbaum's (1995) categories of objectification, these performances can be deconstructed as homosocial enactments. I identify six out of the seven categories that Nussbaum puts forward: instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, ownership, and denial of subjectivity as salient in this context.

Instrumentality

First, and most important, is the notion of *instrumentality*. We turn women into objects, which we can use as tools to further other men's perception of our masculinity. As Kimmel (2005, 33) notes, an extreme version of instrumentality occurs when women become a form of capital to be purchased in the marketplace of masculinity. The use of code words displays the projection of instrumentality in full effect. The focus of the objectification here is shown not to be aimed primarily toward the woman herself, but to the other men from whom we seek "validation" of sexual prowess and masculinity. They become the currency that Kimmel talks of, in the sense that we cash in on their presence to improve other's perception of ourselves.

Denial of Autonomy and Inertness

The second process is that of a denial of autonomy and self-determination. By using code words in this instrumental way, we hold the power of determining their worth within the homosocial environment. Women do not have the control and autonomy to put forward their own identity because we do not allow them to have an actual presence within our interactions. They are, by necessity, distanced from ourselves, positioned as outside objects which we incorporate into our masculine space. In this sense, we also treat them as having a quality of *inertness* or lacking in agency.

Fungibility

One particularly strong aspect of objectifying women through code words is by making them interchangeable with one another, what philosophers such as Nussbaum refer to as *fungibility*. The women are no longer distinct individuals, but all one and the same – a ‘Taniwha’ or a ‘don.’ This universalizing quality effectively erases all difference between the women we objectify. They are no longer understood as different people; they are the tool we use to compete with each other’s masculinities and confirm our place within the homosocial order. They become as impersonal and interchangeable as the currency that they represent. This is exemplified when Mike says that “when someone goes “don’s”, we’re all like, “fuck yeah, she’s got a mean arse”. We erase their individuality and reduce them to physical attributes. Rae Langton (2009, 228-229) purports that objectification often involves a reduction to appearance, and to body parts. As we see with Mike’s comment, we reduce women in this way when we use code words. This removes individual aspects of the women and turns all women into assemblages of body parts, distinct from each other only in the level of attraction we find toward them.

Ownership

The act of spotting and naming the woman as a ‘don’ first entails a claim of *ownership*. By erasing their individuality, and in doing so turn them into tools for the express purpose of performing our masculinity, we effectively lay claim to the women through the act of labelling. The person who first spots and labels the woman gains the most value out of the homosocial interaction. Women here represent a masculine currency with which we

can purchase an improved perception of masculinity (Kimmel 2005). We obtain this currency through our objectification.

Denial of Subjectivity

Objectification through code words involves a denial of subjectivity. Women's own feelings or views over this act are not considered important; rather, it is our feelings that are granted a legitimacy. I have spoken to some of our female friends who are aware of this behavior and they have made it very clear to me, and to the others, that they find this practice degrading towards women. However, this does not seem to stop us from engaging in it. An interesting aspect of this discussion is how differently we treat the women that we have friendships with. The use of code words is strictly contained to women that we have little or no relationship to. When we have an awareness of the subjectivity of the women that we find attractive, the practice stops being directed at them. Dan noted on the subject of objectification that "it depends how well you know them. If you're really good friends with the girl . . . and you know she's a cool person, you're not gonna objectify her." This shows how when subjectivity invades the object, they are no longer tools with which we can manage our masculinity, or at least not in the same way.

Reflections

My own experiences with this objectification via code words illuminate further aspects of instrumentality. This practice of objectification has been going on for as long as I have known the participants. At first, I was actively involved in the practice, but as I grew more aware of gender issues I have, on a number of occasions, discussed my concerns about our actions. Mike identified a trend he sees in the relationship between masculinity and playful sexism: "It's not ok for men to complain about things. If you complain about it, you're a sook." My critique of masculinity can be seen as affecting the position I hold within the homosocial environment. My friends have learnt to be more careful around me in terms of how they perform their masculinity. Apologies have become a normal part of our day-to-day interaction, with my friends feeling the need to appeal to my sensibilities any time they make a comment they worry I would find inappropriate. I have become a threat, not to their embodied masculinity, but to the freedom of their expression of it. What is interesting is how uncomfortable these confrontations make me. The use of code words is something

that I no longer perform myself, but I often passively engage in an effort to be seen part of the group. This shows a kind of reverse effect of instrumentality: when I question our objectification of women in instrumental ways, I feel emasculated and separated from the homosocial order. While I may not actively involve myself anymore, I still benefit from my silence. I recognize that I *should* be more active in my criticism; however, most of the time this awareness does not translate to action due to my fear of losing my masculine status. In this way, I enable and reproduce misogynistic objectification through silence, and sometimes passive engagement, in an effort to retain some sense of the instrumental value the objectified women represent.

This silence also shows a level of hybrid masculinity. I may take efforts to criticize and question masculinity in a variety of forms, but this does always not mean that I stay in this role. I can switch in and out of it at will. Depending on my motivation, I may stay in a critical profeminist role even when I find it uncomfortable or detrimental to my social standing in specific social contexts. However, I can also choose to ignore it. My moral and ideological positioning make the prospect of actively participating in many sexist behaviors unpalatable, but just because I do not like what is on offer does not mean I order off the menu. My privilege allows me to jump in and out of complicit or defiant roles. In this sense, when I feel any emotional burnout or low motivation, I can simply take off the activist guise and ease into the comfortable role of indifference. The hybrid factor of this is made more apparent when I consider the times I am prompted to switch roles. I may be able to switch in and out of roles in the homosocial environment described here, but this changes when I shift my social context. If I find myself around people who value the critical and questioning role I can consciously adopt it to better fit in within the context at hand. In social contexts such as university or around many of my female friends the profeminist side of me becomes my default persona. I am sure I do not do this completely disingenuously – I absolutely do strive for social justice – but it *would* be disingenuous to claim that I do not relish in and enjoy the positive attention and approval I gain for displaying feminist values.

Summary

Using code words to objectify women poses a myriad of consequences for the women in question. While Nussbaum's forms of objectification are all important in their

own respect, instrumentality and denial of subjectivity seemed to be the most important in this performance. The denial of subjectivity seems here to be the initiating condition in this particular type of sexual objectification, while instrumentality is the end goal. The power of objectifying women is in the use value that men receive. Without use value within this scenario, an objectified woman contains no instrumental purpose for the man. If these women are not instrumental in any way, the process of objectification becomes a useless endeavor, and a waste of time and energy. Thus, this process of objectification is aimed towards making a woman instrumental. However, it is not possible to do so without denying women their subjectivity, and, in fact, this is impeded when subjectivity forces its way in. We can infer from this that there is a kind of hierarchy and process to Nussbaum's theory of objectification. The denial of subjectivity acts as a catalyst through which we can begin to remove all the barriers to being able to treat women as instrumental tools.

Conclusion

This specific case is, from the outset, a blunt and obvious example of objectification. Our actions show a conscious and deliberate mindset that treats women as tools we can use for our benefit and amusement. Objectification in this context strongly echoes Beth A. Quinn's (2002) ethnography of workplace sexism. We are able to create and maintain collective identities through communal displays of objectification that we treat as a lighthearted bit of fun. Much like Quinn (2002, 391) observes, women are regarded as objects rather than participants in a game that utilizes them to increase our social standing within our homosocial environment. Nearly all aspects of Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification are present within this scenario, with some being more important or operational than others.⁴ The implications of this are twofold. First, we can observe one instance of how men use objectification as a technique of power that forges collective identities while at the same time helping us be competitive within the homosocial order. Second, it is interesting to see how Nussbaum's theory can be used to examine objectification along different axes of analysis to better understand the nuances and complexities involved in specific contexts. My analysis here puts forth instrumentality and denial of subjectivity as the most conspicuous elements at play, and we can infer from this

⁴ The only category not obviously apparent is 'violability'. An argument can be made for the presence of this category here, but we save this discussion for the next chapter.

how the chosen example of objectification unfolds as well as aspects of its form. However, other examples of objectification may weigh more towards other categories of Nussbaum's theory and thus we would be able to examine this in greater detail. Here we see that a great strength of Nussbaum's theory is its broadness and adaptability to any scenario. While it may not be perfect as a philosophical authority on the definition of objectification, nor does she claim it to be, Nussbaum's theory provides a very useful lens with which we can analyze and break down different elements of objectification. This will be demonstrated further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Objectification of Sexual Partners

Dave: what is femininity? What is woman to you?

Sam: Pussaaaayy. Just gonna put it out there

Dave: That's a big thing. Females are, like, sexual for us, right?

Sam: If you're not fully pleased, it can [have an] effect on your manliness

Mike: Yeah that's true, like, what, it's a female that makes you more masculine, you know? If you're in a relationship, then that makes you more of a man. If you're a man who's not had a relationship, you get seen as less of a man.

Introduction

This chapter uses data obtained through my personal circle of friends in FG1. The previous chapter examined how we used code words for women as part of a collective practice of objectification, which we undertook as a way of managing our position within our homosocial group. Here I will turn away from direct techniques developed within our group and towards more abstract or symbolic ways we view women, specifically our sexual and romantic partners, which may not always appear to be objectifying but are nonetheless undergirded with the same or similar notions. Again, I analyze the discussion in FG1 and relate it back to Nussbaum's (1995) seven categories of objectification. I then discuss one of Nussbaum's categories, violability, which seems absent from our discussion thus far. While violability may not be apparent on the surface in the discussion, I propose that objectification aids in the sustenance and maintenance of rape culture within our society. After a discussion of the general idea of rape culture and its relation to objectification, I narrow my focus onto some of the ways that men practice humor that degrade women and render them as objects we can treat as violable.

Instrumentality

Much like through the use of code words, women are used for masculine validation: a tool of promoting hegemonic ideas that furthers his dominion in his homosocial habitat. A sexual partner is translated by other men as evidence of sexual activity, which is important to hegemonic masculinity. Long term, monogamous relationships may signify a lack of

promiscuity in a man's sex life, however it still signifies a strong sexuality. Unlike the previous form of objectification, the embodied presence of a woman is not needed within the homosocial environment. Rather, they are objectified through a process of abstraction which removes their presence from the situation and turns them into a symbolic ideal.

This was further demonstrated in the focus group when we discussed how a lack of extensive sexual experience made us feel anxious about the state of our masculinity. Dan told us that "I haven't lost my virginity . . . [and my] friends roast me about it. Dan's virginity is perceived by his friends as a failure of masculinity. If a sexual partner is objectified as an instrumental tool, it is a tool that Dan has yet to obtain. As Sam noted, "if you're not fully pleased, it can [have an] effect your manliness. Dan's masculinity suffers due not having this tool, as can be seen in how his friends "roast" him for it.

My own experiences are quite telling in this regard. At one point I aired the concerns I had about my long-term relationship when I was younger.

Dave: Having only been with [my wife] my whole life . . . she's the only person I've had any sort of romantic or physical interaction with. For a long time that made me feel really weird, like, am I fucking this up?

Mike: When I think of you I think you're a fucking man. You manned up [referring to my marriage] . . . I feel it's more manly that you are true to yourself.

Their evaluation of my masculinity was deeply linked with my status as a married man. While I may have lacked promiscuous sexual experience, this was offset by my solid relationship. My marriage symbolized to the participants both an implicit recognition of my sexual activity, but more importantly a perception of being in control of my life. I did not realize at the time that I found a great amount of validation in their perception of my masculinity. Upon further reflection, I can say that I feel this today more than ever. For a long time, I experienced anxiety over my long-term relationship due to masculine ideals of promiscuity. However, today I am comfortable in my masculine identity largely due to my marriage. Reflecting on this, I would say I use my wife as an instrumental tool to define and solidify my masculine identity.

Denial of Autonomy

This practice of objectification involves the abstraction of real women into symbolic objects that solidify a man's sexuality. Due to their lack of any physical presence in this scenario, women are also denied autonomy and are treated as inert. The level of interpretation which men use to understand sexual partners is focused on how it affects the man. In this sense autonomy is not necessarily negated, but rather it is never even part of the equation. Displays of autonomy actually let a bit of air out of men's display of masculinity. The *idea* of 'having' a woman differs to the reality of being in a relationship. If a man competes in a homosocial environment to display his masculinity, the presence of a woman who has some control over the way a man behaves undermines his display of masculinity. Much like the practice of using code words, when an awareness of a woman's subjectivity and personality obstructs the practice of objectification, the display of feminine autonomy and agency creates an invasion of subjectivity into the symbolic and abstract woman. This would remove the woman as object from the possession of the man, thus further undermining his masculinity. This is supported when Sam mentions that "I'm a soft cock in front of [my girlfriend]." The woman who signals his successful masculinity has the opposite effect on Sam when she has an embodied and autonomous presence, rather than simply being an abstract idea. Given that the phallus is one of the strongest symbols of masculinity (Bordo 1999), the allusion to impotence is a straightforward claim to a failure of masculinity. Thus, when the symbolic feminine object moves from the abstract world of ideas and into physical existence as an agentic and autonomous subject, the power that she previously represented is deflated. The invasion of feminine autonomy exposes this performative objectification as a farce. Butler (1990) regards gender as a powerful factor in society, but incredibly fragile when interrogated. When the woman enters the picture as an embodied, autonomous individual, the illusion of masculinity gained from this type of objectification is shattered.

Fungibility

Women are *fungible* and become interchangeable, both with objects of the same type, and objects of different types. Their interchangeability with objects of the same type is seen through the fact that a unique, individual woman is not what is instrumental to the

man. What is instrumental is the symbolic idea of an abstract and disembodied presence of a woman. Thus, who the actual woman is does not necessarily matter. Whether it is Mary or Helen, it does not change the validation the man receives from other men.

It could be argued also that women are treated here as interchangeable with objects of other types too. Given the wide variety of ways in which a man can signal his masculinity to other people, the abstract woman as a sex symbol could be swapped for other symbols of masculinity such as promiscuity or aggressiveness. As noted above, my own anxieties attached to my failing the promiscuous masculine stereotype were counteracted through my relationship status with my wife. In this way, I was able to successfully manage and maintain my masculinity by swapping out one symbol of masculinity for another. Obtaining all the symbols of masculinity may be the goal in the hunt for hegemonic status; however, if one fails to obtain the woman as a sex symbol this does not mean that they will necessarily be seen as less masculine than their peers, who are probably also failing in some respects.

Ownership

Women are objects of *ownership*. Through the reduction of the real woman to the level of abstraction, women become symbolic objects in the possession of the man who they grant validation to. Mike notes that women are often seen as “notches on the bedpost”:

Mike: That’s another masculinity thing. Notches on the bedpost. Seeing people as an acquisition rather than a person that you have sex with. It’s like sex with a person is something you can acquire without actually having any physical manifestation. In high school, once I’d lost my virginity, it made a point of being like, ok, I get validation from every single person I bang. It comes from a place of insecurity I reckon.

Here women as an object of ownership imply sexual activity that grants men validation. Sex does not have a physical manifestation in the sense it is not an object that you can show off to your friends, but it is something that you can show off to your friends through the objectification of women as sex symbols. Thus, women act as intermediary between sex and masculinity, they are the physical representation of sex. Important to note is that women are not actually physically present but are abstract and symbolic. Thus, they are perhaps not a *physical* manifestation but some sort of an implicit and abstract manifestation of sex. This

relates back to the idea of women as currency with which we can purchase greater amounts of masculinity. Through our ownership of the women that we sleep with, we barter our way into a better position within homosocial environments.

Denial of Subjectivity

In this scenario, women's subjectivity is not appealed to. However, it is not necessarily denied. When pondering this aspect, I wondered how women might feel about our objectification of them as symbols that promote our masculinity. As discussed, I am directly involved in this process through the validation my peers confer unto me because I am married. To try and gain some subjective insight into this, I asked my wife how she felt about me objectifying her in this way. One woman's opinions could never represent the subjectivity of every woman in the world, but her thoughts on the matter, at the very least, open up a discussion. My wife's response was mixed. While she disapproved of any action in which I might actively parade her in an explicitly sexual way to boast to my friends of my sexual prowess, she was positive about her presence in my friends' perception of my masculinity. Indeed, she was "happy to help". Her reasoning for this was a cognizance of the "mutual respect" that we have for each other. She even found this objectification to have possibly beneficial consequences on my friends. She noted that she would rather that they look up to someone because they are in a loving and solid relationship, rather than looking up to men who might display other masculine traits such as aggression or risk taking. This engages with a proposal of Nussbaum's (1995) that objectification need not be inherently negative. She writes that "some features of objectification . . . may in fact in some circumstances . . . be either necessary or even wonderful features of sexual life. Seeing this will require, among other things, seeing how the allegedly impossible combination between (a form of) objectification and "equality, respect, and consent" might after all be possible" (1995, 251). She contains her analysis of positive objectification mainly to sexual interactions between willing partners; however, I believe, due to my wife's input, that we can extend it to this particular performance of objectification. My objectification of her is understood to be conducted within a frame of consideration and respect. I may use her as an instrumental tool, but I do not deny her subjectivity, and remain aware of her autonomy and agency. This shows that objectification can be positive only as far as their subjectivity remains intact.

Violability

Nussbaum's (1995) category of violability appears missing in both the analyses above. We can nonetheless draw out some explicit ways that we treat women as violable, and also the subtler ways that objectification reproduces rape cultures. I will begin with a discussion of how the objectification I have discussed thus far, and objectification in general, contributes to dynamics of sexual abuse. I will then analyze masculine humor that objectifies women as violable objects.

Objectification and Rape Culture

The types of objectification we covered in the focus group showed no indication that any sort of actual physical harassment was part of our performances of masculinity. Indeed, the physical presence of women as subjective and autonomous individuals in these scenarios seemed to expose the farce that they were. However, this does not mean that these performances escape an analysis of violability. While we all agreed that any sort of physical abuse, be it harassment, rape, or violence, was unacceptable, this only works at the micro level of our specific actions. What this omits is the fact that these acts of objectification are produced by, and reproduce, structural elements of sexism and abuse that work at a societal level. The idea of a 'rape culture' provides a "radical critique of conventional assumptions about rape as an aberrant act of a deviant individual. Rather, it suggests, rape is connected to and enabled by a myriad of everyday social and cultural practices" (Sills *et al.* 2016, 2). It has been widely noted that the everyday activity of sexual objectification contributes to this rape culture, and violence towards women (Attenborough 2014; Sills *et al.* 2016; Walsh 2015). Rape statistics showcase just how common sexual abuse is. According to studies, 19% of American college women have experienced some form of sexual assault (Krebs *et al.* 2009). Further studies show that 37% of American college men admit to considering rape if they knew that they could get away with it (Kimmel 2005, 189). Rape is instrumental in its purpose. It is often a tool used by men who feel powerless to try and recover a sense of masculine identity they perceive as lost or diminished (Kimmel 2005). In this way, women are objectified by treating them as a tool that can be used to build a sense of one's identity. By objectifying the women using code words, we reproduce these dynamics by continuing the normalization of understanding women as objects without

subjectivity or autonomy. Both our objectification, and objectification that leads to rape, is a tool that denies women of their subjectivity and basic rights for the purpose of strengthening men's subjectivities and power. The only barrier to objectification overflowing into sexual abuse is that men must necessarily disregard the bodily integrity and subjectivity of women, thus rendering them violable. The objectification we perform lays down the groundwork for the more extreme form. What this shows is that objectification of women and sexual assault of women work along the same dynamics: treating women as tools with which we construct our masculinity. Our objectification of women may not reach the levels of sexual assault, but they definitely reproduce discourse and norms that legitimizes rape in the masculine imagination.

Misogynistic Humor

The participants expressed an awareness of some of the more pernicious aspects of masculinity. We discussed the normality, especially during our adolescence, of humor that involved the treatment of women as violable objects. One joke that Frank recalled hearing from male friends when he was younger was "The Houdini". This is a sexual scenario that involves blindfolding a woman during sex, and then swapping places with a friend. The payload from the scenario is when the woman realizes that the man she is having intercourse with is not the man she consented to. Frank found this funny at the time, but looking back on it he remarked, "Isn't that rape? That's fucked up. That's not funny. And they were laughing while saying it". Here, Frank recognizes that masculine humor often treats women as violable. This bears a striking resemblance to an empirically documented practice called "the rodeo" (Grailey 2014, 115). Jeannine A. Grailey (2014, 115), in her research on fat women, describes a rodeo as an act that "takes place when a man's friends hide in the room where the couple is having sexual intercourse. When the friends think the couple is "really into it," they jump out of hiding and typically yell, snap pictures, and set a stopwatch to time how long their friend can hold on to the woman before she "escapes"". These similarities are concerning: they both treat women as violable objects which men can use for their own amusement and construction of masculinity. The participants link this type of humor to the culture of one-upmanship that is prevalent within masculinity (Grazian 2007):

Frank: You start off with little jokes and [then] you kaboom to a big one

Mike: that's because the goal when you are a young man is to come up with the most gnarly shit you can think of . . . I remember at school camp we used to talk about 'strawberry cheesecake', where you cum in a girl's face and punch her in the nose and mix the cum with blood. Shit like that . . . it's fucking gnarly.

This second example of masculine humor adds an explicit amount of violence to the scenario. Through humor, we objectify women as instrumental tools to construct our masculinity within homosocial environments. We enter a competition of who can be the more ruthless, disgusting, and disrespectful, with the winner coming away with a dominant masculinity.

Autonomy and subjectivity are certainly denied in these depictions of rape and violence that portray a woman as an eminently violable object. They are further rendered inert in the forceful denial of their autonomy. There is a wealth of research which shows a positive correlation between the enjoyment of sexist, misogynistic humor, and men's rape proclivity (Romero-Sánchez et al. 2009; Ryan & Kanjorski 1998; Viki et al. 2007). Most of the participants expressed an aversion toward this kind of humor and recognized many of these situations as rape. I do not think the participants are in any way inclined toward sexual abuse. However, there is a particular type of objectification that, again, legitimizes a depiction of women as violable that has become a norm within masculine culture. More importantly, this normalization of violent humor socializes young men into a mindset that, as has been empirically proven, positively correlates toward actual sexual abuse.

Summary

There are many similarities between this type of objectification, and the objectification of women through code words. Their instrumentality is nearly identical in the way that they can be used as tools or currency to solidify others' perception of our masculinity. In both scenarios' women are treated as owned, although they differ in how ownership is signified. With code words one simple word can lay claim to a woman as an instrumental tool, while objectification of women in this scenario needs some sort of relationship before ownership can be claimed. The denial of autonomy takes on greater importance when sexual partners are treated as symbols of masculinity. In the code word

scenario, autonomy never enters the picture unless we begin to grow aware of a woman's subjectivity. However, when objectifying sexual partners, we are aware of their autonomy, but deny it to emphasize our masculinity. It is the invasion of autonomy, in this scenario, that shatters the masculine illusion. The denial of subjectivity in both scenarios shows the greatest divergence from each other. Our use of code words denies subjectivity as we are aware that women find such actions demeaning, but do not appeal to the women's feelings. The objectification of sexual partners as symbols of masculinity, however, opens up discussion into how objectification could possibly be benign, or even positive.

This directly counters the views of radical feminist thinkers, such as Dworkin or MacKinnon, who perceive objectification as inherently negative. Dworkin (2000, 30) writes that "subordination is *objectification*". I agree with this sentiment. Oppression and subordination of groups of people necessarily involves objectification. However, following Nussbaum, I propose that the converse is not true: objectification is not *necessarily* subordination.

Conclusion

Objectification occurs on many different levels. In chapter four we saw a direct and conscious act performed by men as a way of improving individual standings within the group while at the same time forging collective identities and bonds at the expense of the targeted women. The objectification covered in this chapter echoes many of these facets, but we also see clear ways in which it differs in both intent and consequence. The way we objectify our sexual partners in this context seems far less actively geared toward fostering collective identities while at the same time echoing the use of code words in its appeal to successful portrayals of masculinity and sexual prowess. As a point of difference, this form of objectification serves as a performative act that reifies one's sense of gendered identity through repeated performances that help give one a sense of masculinity.

This chapter shows another strength in Nussbaum's (1995) theory. The two cases of objectification explored in this and the previous chapter are markedly different in the ways they are enacted as well as the intent behind them. Using Nussbaum's theory as a lens to analyze both allows us to contrast one with the other. What we can see is some of the similarities and differences in processes at play. Breaking down single cases of

objectification into Nussbaum's seven types, we can analyze small details and nuances we may otherwise miss if we do not use a common frame of reference when approaching research.

Chapter 6. Multiple Masculinities: Differences in homosocial configurations of gender

The three groups of male friends who participated in the focus groups display a wide range of differing ways in which friendship is conducted, maintained, and managed. We see aspects of both traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity and contemporary trends outlined by inclusive and hybrid masculinity theories. There was an interesting split between FG1 (my group of friends), and both FG2 and FG3 in the balance of these displays. FG2 and FG3 demonstrated a considerably larger amount of reflexivity and subversion in their perception and performance of masculinity in that they were more critical in their evaluations, and they actively expressed a desire to pull away from gender norms. Consequently, they achieved a limited but significant amount of empathy and compassion for women. These two groups of men bonded mainly through emotional disclosure, intimacy, and support. FG1 was weighed more toward common expressions of homophobic and sexist masculinity and, while displaying differing levels of subversion depending on the individual, formed homosocial bonds through competition, sexist discourse, and expressions of masculinity. In short, where FG2 and FG3 formed a collective code of conduct based on tolerance, respect, and support – FG1 formed our collective code of conduct based on competition, posturing, and objectification.

There are numerous paths in seeking out explanations as to why there is such a substantive split in gender performances between the two groups. It is not within the scope of this thesis to outline them all in specific detail, but I will focus on two differences that potentially support evidence of why this is. The first is the context of how the friendship began and was formed. FG2 and FG3 were both groups of men who formed close friendships at High School and subsequently maintained their friendships in the years after. FG1 was formed around the locus of our workplace, including both co-workers in the place of employment and people introduced either as customers or as prior friends of the co-workers. Here we see a difference in how, and possibly why, these friendships are being maintained. FG2 and FG3 required active and ongoing maintenance in the form of consciously seeking out interaction with each other. They were all living relatively separate lives and chose to see each other out of a desire for interactions with these specific people. FG1 was formed through the context of work, and while there was a real and significant connection developed, interaction was in many ways a matter of context and circumstance.

Due to many of us working together, we spent a lot of time with each other and bonds were formed through circumstance and possibly even necessity. In this context, collective symbolic values and meanings are much weaker due to lesser amount of time we have had to develop emotional connections and in response it is possible we revert to hegemonic ideals as an easily comprehensible guide to how to behave around one another. Group performances and individual roles are not developed over the course of adolescent 'coming of age' years, but rather picked up wholesale from predetermined cultural models. I believe we find some supporting evidence of this in the other focus groups.

This chapter will now move to an analysis of the focus group data. Two main areas are explored. First, men in FG2 and FG3 discussed similar behavior prevalent in FG1 that they had observed or participated in during high school. Second, objectification and homosocial gender performances in the workplace.

6.1 School

In both FG2 and FG3 the men reported that, while not significant today, elements of normative hegemonic masculinity and objectification were more common during their school years. FG2 contained perhaps the least amount of overt sexism. These men, by all appearances, seemed to have developed a friendship based around subverting common ideals of sexist male behavior. However, it was not always that way:

Howard: one thing I do remember in our friendship group and this is like long past. But we did have a thing where we'd monitor each other's, the amount of people we'd slept with. But then that stopped probably, yeah, definitely before we left high school. But yeah, we did have that back in the day

Nick: 'How many are you on?' [laughs].

The value of sexual performance during high school was an important part of how men built their identities around one another. We can see how at this stage in their life women were used as currency in negotiating hegemonic positions in homosocial groups. This is echoed again later when Howard describes how social pressures led him to fear entering sexual relationships with women that his friends would think unattractive:

Howard: I think I, like, reduced my possible sexual experience by having really, kind of, high standards which I now kind of regret. But yeah, back in high school and stuff I think I denied myself a lot of experiences just by not... um... yeah and I feel like that's a bad thing.

Here we can see the paralyzing power of hegemonic masculinity within homosocial groups. Gender policing by other members led Howard to limit his relationship with women due to social pressure for men to only sleep with women of a "high standard".

The power of expectations of masculinity during school years was repeated in FG3.

Trevor: I remember feeling like a huge relief when I lost my virginity -

Ricky: Same. Big time! Fucking get rid of that motherfucker

Trevor: I was just like fuck... yeah yeah, I was just like, mean. Big sigh of relief. But, yeah. But also to do with sex like I do remember feeling massive anxiety for being judged. Like, for being... my behavior being interpreted as being gay. Like, all like, you know. You know. Like weak or something like that.

Cory: Like a social pressure of [Trevor: yeah yeah] yeah yeah

Ricky: Like, before you lost your virginity?

Trevor: Aw yeah, fuck yeah. Even like at primary school, you know, people would describe certain behavior as gay and like, you know?

This shows a related but different side of managing social positions within homosocial groups. The fear in this excerpt is more aimed toward distancing oneself from homosexuality rather than necessarily proving one's successful performance of masculinity. Losing virginity was "a relief" due to his anxiety at being perceived as gay. Sexual experience here proves one's heterosexuality and thus bolsters their position within the group. Jim notes how at High School other people were a threat to be overcome rather than to be related with:

Jim: I'm in a school with 1500 guys. And like you don't want to be the bottom of the pecking chain and you start trying to stand on other people's heads not to drown. So, it's kind of like a survival of the fittest thing that goes on there. Where it's like, you might get made fun of, so you make fun of someone else type of thing. And it's like a bad cycle. So

that's where it was most effective. Or like, effective in a bad way, you know? Like, where you kind of get an, or I got a negative view of sexuality, masculinity.

The desperate need to prove oneself was apparent in their High School years. Whether it be to prove sexual proficiency or to dissuade possible accusations of homosexuality, women became a key tool in which men could jockey for a better position in their masculine environments.

6.2 Work

Another space where these men, who had for the most part grown out of their reliance on sexist behavior to bond with each other, witnessed or were involved in overt expressions of objectification and misogyny was in the workplace. In FG2, Kevin recounted a scenario at his work that was very similar to the behavior my group of friends and I developed while working together.

Kevin: a similar thing happened... I was working in kitchens for like quite a while and they would always have, the other chefs would have an order number that they yell out if there was a hot girl who walked into the restaurant

While slightly different to the code that we had figured out, this is almost identical to how we would sexually objectify women in a homosocial setting and meets most of Nussbaum's (1995) categories of objectification. We see the play between men in observing, identifying, and communicating the presence of a sexually attractive woman. This behavior indicates a strong sense of instrumentality in its performance by a closed circle of men as a way of building camaraderie through a game of objectifying women.

FG3 also had work stories that showcased a much stronger sense of objectification. Jim told us of how he and his male co-workers would play a game among themselves that focused on a woman who worked in a building next to them.

Jim: There's a girl that works in one of them who's an attractive young lady. And then like, we all kind of like make jokes about... like one guy will be like, 'hey that's my ex bro, don't talk about my ex that way'. Or like... and we'll be driving past, and we'll be like, 'I had the best chat with Paula today'. And everyone's kind of lying about how close they are with Paula. So, everyone like is... it's a competition to see who can pretend like their

closest with Paula. And their like, 'oh that's just my girl Paula'. And they'll all just wave at her and be like, 'see how she waved at me not you'.

Here we see another way in which men bond and build relationships with each other using the presence of attractive women. Their playful competition focuses on one-upping each other in their pretend fantasies of how Paula shows approval to one over the other. The language used is one of ownership: "Don't talk about *my* ex that way"; "that's just *my* girl Paula". They play a game of possession in which whoever is holding the game piece is winning the game. This is illustrative of Nussbaum's (1995) category of *ownership* in full force. The woman in question is turned into a trophy that one seeks to obtain.

While there is no evidence that they treat her in any kind of disrespectful way in interaction with her, their homosocial play still serves to strengthen bonds by using a woman as a signal of their masculinity. Trevor also had a similar story:

Trevor: Well, think back to the Hell's Pizza days when you had like... we were like early twenties and all delivery boys and all these phone girls, and some of them real hot. And like, we almost had like falling outs over shit that happened you know? Like, we would just coax each other by just saying like, 'oh fuck yeah...' and if one of us said happy birthday to the other one on Facebook we'd all 'like' it and then like, [laughter] someone would get really pissed off.

Jim: Cos that is a form of objectification because you're pretending like that she's yours more than she is someone else's. Instead of that she's her own person your kind of like my relationship to her is a closer relationship than you have to her.

Trevor: 'She added me as a friend on Facebook'. What she added you? And it's like, 'yeah, I just sent her a friend request'.

Cory: So real

Ricky: Yeah, so real

Jim: So that's definitely a camaraderie thing because that's, more so than the relationship with the girl cos none of us know her that well. But we'd all have our joke between ourselves you know like...

Trevor: Yeah, none of us... we just wanted to be perceived to be like fuckin in with her.

Trevor's story follows the same narrative as Jim's. The men in the pizza shop conducted their friendship through playful competition with each other over who was more appealing to the women. The nature of workplace 'man talk' can quickly turn much more sinister than this though.

Cory: In my formal workplace big time. But that was ridiculous you know. But um, that's also just part of the car cock macho culture that was there as well. So...

Interviewer: So, like in what ways was this kind of happening

Cory: Aw like... for instance, you know, rape jokes about co-workers. Very dark stuff. But, you know, cos I wasn't getting involved in that shit I was the outsider or whatever. I'd just be like, no, I'm above you guys.

This shows how homosocial expressions of objectification as a form of play or game can quickly become imbued with much more violent and insidious meanings. Nussbaum's (1995) category of *violability* comes into play here as the men discuss women as objects to be raped and assaulted. This kind of humor and language may not necessarily be serious; however, as discussed in *Chapter 5* such language and humor are positively correlated with both self-reported rape proclivity (Romero-Sánchez et al. 2009; Ryan & Kanjorski 1998; Viki et al. 2007) as well reinforcing patriarchal attitudes associated with a wider rape culture (Pérez & Greene 2016). What is interesting is that it seems there is a limit to how much misogyny or objectification some men can stomach in the pursuit of social bonds. Cory's inability to engage in these activities relegated him to an outside status in the group of men he worked with. There is also an element of discursive distancing (Bridges & Pascoe 2016) at play when Cory explains this. He takes a moral position against sexist and misogynistic workplace culture, but also discursively separates himself from the others as being "above" them. To be fair, there was a sense of humor as he said this, and I do not think he is consciously elitist, but the language used still serves to separate 'good' men from 'bad' men – diluting masculinity's implication in the act.

One interesting point of difference came up in accounts of how the men treat women they are attracted to at work. We have seen how men develop bonds through playful homosocial enactments of objectification. Ricky, on the other hand, shows how attraction and objectification of his co-worker can produce different effects.

Ricky: There's a [woman] at my work who's pretty sexy. And um, I guess it's like I'd be more willing... I guess subconsciously I'm more willing to adhere to her instructions probably than I am with the same age group teacher, not that there is one, but that would be of a lesser attractiveness . . . it's not like I see her as a potential sexual partner or anything like that. It's more like, I guess, maybe deep down I'm associating her attractiveness with like a deeper personality or maybe a lot more strength just cos she's physically attractive, which is of course ridiculous, but like there's something innate in me that goes oh she's probably more right because she's sexy

Jim: She has more social weight than someone who's not...

Ricky: Yeah, exactly. She carries slightly more social weight for some fucking reason.

This is an interesting and complex aspect of objectification that in some ways turns the process on its head. Ricky talks of a co-worker he is attracted to and we see aspects of objectification occurring in his focus on her appearance and body (Langton 2009), and at some level in her autonomy as he places her value upon her appearance (Nussbaum 1995). At the same time, this process of objectification serves to make Ricky highly attentive of her feelings and authority. He is more willing to go out of his way to please her and he sees her as possessing a higher level of authority and power than others including himself. Also, his change in behavior around her does not appear to be a technique to develop a physical or romantic relationship with her. This proposes a very complicated and mixed aspect to how objectification and power come into play. On one level, we see a one-sided objectification from Ricky that serves to give a woman more power and authority. On another level, while he may pay more attention to her feelings and subjectivity it is quite possible that this is a false projection of what he considers to be her subjectivity. This "halo effect" is a common cognitive bias that alters our perception of ability and character regarding people that we consider beautiful (Palmer & Peterson 2016). When we withdraw our view from this individual performance and take stock of the ramifications of attitudes like his in wider society. For instance, if this is a common phenomenon, then beautiful women are given more consideration, power, and value than plain or unattractive women. Ricky has no delusions that this is kind or considerate behavior. He recognizes its detachment from reality and acknowledges the issues in this attitude. While perhaps less clear at first than our

other examples, this shows us another way in which women's ability and character are reduced to their appearance.

6.3 Summary

The way men perform masculinity, including styles of presentation and collective behaviors, come in many forms. This chapter attempts to analyze what factors are necessary in developing more prosocial and reflexive forms of masculinity. The split between FG1's more problematic behaviors in comparison to FG2 and FG3 is complex and hard to fully deconstruct within this chapter. One key factor that was apparent, however, was the environmental and interpersonal contexts in which the friendships were formed. FG2 and FG3 established their friendship during high school and have stayed close ever since. FG1 is relatively new and was established through a mixed group of coworkers and some outside members revolving around the workplace. FG1 exhibits plenty of problematic behaviors and finds its group bonds maintained more through competition and displays of masculinity such as objectification. FG2 and FG3 noted that where they once fell into some sexist or toxic behaviors associated with masculinity during high school, the subsequent years have seen their friendship develop and mature to the point where collective bonds are maintained more through emotional and empathetic sharing rather than competitive bravado. When FG2 and FG3 discussed some of their individual workplace environments, however, there were similar examples of sexist performances of masculinity found within FG1. I propose that, in this scenario, homosocial groups that exhibit prosocial behavior were able to do so after their friendship had developed emotional intimacy. The relatively new incarnation of FG1 potentially impacts how we behave as we had yet to develop an emotional intimacy with each other. This lack of emotional intimacy means that it is easier to strengthen group bonds by appealing to existing frameworks and scripts of masculinity that prescribe ways to act. The appearance of similar dynamics in individual accounts of workplaces in FG2 and FG3 backs this up.

Chapter 7. Differences in experience: the case for (and limits of) empathy

The men in the focus groups consistently demonstrated a break in opinion and perspective when discussing objectification compared to the women's accounts. While for the most part objectification was understood as negative, and they could recognize how and why it can be negative, there were significant differences in how they conceived the effects subjectively. In all the focus groups with men I asked a variety of questions that asked them to either describe their own experiences of being objectified, or to try and imagine what it would be like to be objectified from a woman's perspective. There were three aspects that demonstrated a strongly gendered split in how they conceived objectification: the ways in which men perceive the experience of sexual objectification; the moral flexibility in the performance of objectification; and men's perspective of contemporary perceptions of masculinity in the public sphere. To examine these splits in perception, I will first outline the various ways that the women in FG4 discussed how they experienced objectification and the ramifications it has had on their lives, specifically focusing on themes of shame and anxiety (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, 181). I will then compare the men's accounts against them, exposing the chasm of lived experience and its consequences for the development of empathy across genders.

7.1 Consequences of Objectification on Women

Shame

The framework of objectification theory, as outlined by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), explains in great detail the psychological and psychosocial consequences of cultures of objectification. The women in the focus group expressed a deep sense of psychological trauma attached to objectification and specifically the heteronormative gaze of men. Liz recounts how her coming of age into womanhood was directly tied into negative experiences of objectification:

Liz: I always remember so starkly the moment when I became a woman you know, when I was going through puberty to the point where my body was developing. And I went to town with my mum. And I was wearing like a shorter skirt and kind of a small outfit. And I just remember these older, older men staring at me. And I remember just being really taken aback. Like, why are all of these older men looking and then like, my mum's friend

was sort of making comments of how old I was looking and how good I was looking and I was all of a sudden getting this odd sense that I had to perform at, like, like, use my body in a way to please other people.

In this statement, Liz gives a powerful account of how women in contemporary society are interpellated into a mature gender identity through the approval and visual consumption of appearance by older men. She learns at a young age that her body is not just for her, it is also an object for other people's pleasure. Liz strikes a firm connection between being a woman and being sexually objectified. The pressure for women to fit into ideals of beauty and sexual attractiveness are discussed as fundamental building blocks for women's psyche and identity.

Emily: Cos our self-image is so intertwined with our self-worth. And if you're in a position where you're not being sexualized then you're desexualized, and that's worse. Because – no, it's not worse, but it's perceived to be worse – because it's like, well then I'm worthless.

Emily describes the social and moral value placed upon achieving ideal forms of beauty as central to many women's lives. Beauty, specifically beauty that objectifying and sexualizing gazes approve of, becomes one of the major sources of self-worth for women with harsh consequences they cannot access it. As Emily suggests, if women are not perceived as sexual then they are perceived to be worthless, an entity with nothing to contribute. We can see the notion of shame in objectification theory playing a strong role in women's subjective worlds.

The moral impetus to conform to beauty ideals is understood by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) to have a causal relationship to body issues and eating disorders. This is evident in the women's accounts:

Interviewer: do you find physical appearance and attractiveness has been a key concern of yours in your life?

[agreement]

Liz: like one of the number one

Sarah: yeah, I just feel so much better about myself when I feel attractive . . . I don't want to be outside if I don't feel attractive

Liz: I spent so much of my life looking in the mirror and just being like, disgusting [agreement]. Like, disgusting. Yuck. Yuck. Yuck. Ew.

Sarah: like, actually thoughts like that too, not even exaggerating

Liz: not just like, aw that's not perfect. It's like, eeeeeer disgusting! Like yuck

Jess: I used to like pinch myself and fucking... Like I just didn't want to put on any weight. Yeah, just stupid shit.

Liz: yeah, I used to pinch my whole body. Yeah, starve yourself

Jess: I reckon I was like low key bulimic for like two and a half years

Liz: yeah, I think sort of... I think so many women are

Emily: I think so many people are, and they don't have the language to put to it as well. Cos it's just like, aw fuck what? That's full-blown eating disorder. But, only outside of their experience, or looking back or whatever.

This exchange demonstrates the extreme levels of psychological and emotional issues women suffer due to the shame of not living up to conventional standards of beauty. The internalization of objectification is strong here, with the women spending significant amounts of time casting an objectifying gaze on their own bodies in the mirror and criticizing themselves with a level of moral opprobrium much higher than that of a 'normal' objectifying experience of interaction in social life. While men have an obvious sense of false entitlement to judge and criticize women's appearances in a public setting, social conventions would generally stop this before it reached a similar level to how the women describe their self-objectification. Jess exposes how women can be dissuaded from discussing recognizing their own oppression and suffering in the form of increased empathy for others:

Jess: yeah, well that's the thing as well because my friend had like super bad anorexia at the time, so in my mind that was the eating disorder. And I was like, just another woman. You know? Which was weird as well, cos you're always comparing your experience to other people and especially with women cos they're so compassionate your like, they've

had such a hard time, how can I feel like anything? Like I should be grateful for my existence. But actually, there's so much shit that happens and... yeah.

Cultures of objectification work to create a sense of shame and negative self-worth. This is amplified when women minimize their harm due to the existence of more extreme forms suffering. Thus, shame is imbued with a second layer of self-judgment. On top of feeling morally accountable for their inability to achieve beauty ideals, any moment of epiphany in which they grasp the unjust nature of their shame runs the risk of being smothered by guilt over considering their situation to be worthy of criticism when there are people out there who may suffer in greater degrees. Jess's logic here serves to solidify women's experience as one of ordinary suffering. Her "low key" bulimia becomes merged with the very nature of being a woman.

The ability for the internalization of shame to inhibit women's public and civic engagement is also discussed. We see it in the above exchange when Sarah admits that she is hesitant to go outside unless she feels attractive. This is echoed by Emily when she discusses her overwhelming sense of dread at the prospect of walking to the gym in workout gear:

Emily: Me and my dad have this conversation all the time where I'm just like - cos I've just joined the gym today - and um, I just so badly don't want to walk there. I so badly don't want to have to walk [down the street] even though it's like five minutes away, it's just like the most humiliating thing ever . . . it's like so horrific and he just can't understand. He's just like, 'nobody's fucking looking at you. Nobody gives a shit'. And it's like, well it doesn't matter though because I'm just so fucking self-aware that it's just so energy consuming and just so awful.

Emily feels humiliated simply walking down the street when she is in her gym clothes due to the attention she feels they bring upon her body. Her awareness of objectification is heightened to the extent that it makes it difficult for her to engage in an activity that she places high value in. Her goal of going to the gym is not an appeal to beauty ideals, but rather a constructive way to improve her life physically and psychologically. Emily suggests that she is "fucked in [the] head" and wishes to exercise for its therapeutic and rehabilitative qualities. The struggle she faces in even bringing herself to walk to the gym is only part of the battle, due to ways in which her intense self-awareness and self-

consciousness interferes with her ability to “do the shit physically that I would potentially be able to if I didn’t have that aspect of self-objectification”.

Anxiety

Self-objectification leads to a constant state of anxiety, vigilance, and insecurity due to the hyperawareness women experience about their body. The women’s focus group covered many areas and aspects of objectification induced anxiety which fell in line with Fredrickson and Roberts’ (1997) theory. Objectification theory highlights two forms of anxiety that women experience due to cultures of objectification: appearance anxiety and safety anxiety (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, 182). Their anxiety over appearance has been covered somewhat in the last section, so I focus here on the anxiety over safety.

Emily: I’m very, very aware of what I look like, how I’m walking, who I’m with and whatever. But very aware of my body and very aware of how other people are seeing me. And that’s not necessarily... you know, that’s heightened in certain situations you know, someone looking at me or some shit. You know, makes you really get out of your head seeing out and have kind of like be seen through somebody else yourself.

The theme of safety, or lack thereof, was a powerful aspect of the women’s focus group. The women all discussed how, at varying levels, they felt a near constant sense of imminent physical threat. They opened up about how hard it was to find a place of safety where the anxiety over the threat of violence, the tactics they utilized to protect themselves, and the many experiences that drilled into them that they were never really safe.

Emily: That’s also like a safety thing as well, like I’m very aware of when I’m feeling unsafe. Or that... if I’m with somebody else like a female friend it’s like, holy fucking shit

Jess: I got off the train when I was, would have been year nine so 13. And these guys just pulled up in this van and shouted at me like 'we're gonna rape you' and then like drove off. And it’s like, for someone to shout that to you when you're that young. A) I didn’t really know what rape was because no one had, not that I hadn’t come into contact with those ideas, but no one had explained it to me before. I didn’t know what consent was. and then for that to be kind of this force that was around where I was growing up and living, you know like that sort of thing makes you feel so aware of what is happening around you everyday

Emily: Yeah, like horrifically aware of how fucking fragile you are and how people can hurt you. How you're something to be harmed

Liz: Like a piece of meat to be inspected and sort of assigned value to. And you know, used

Jess: And not just value, but like sexual value only. Like you have no like intelligence you have nothing else to offer apart from sexual...

Jess's memory of being the target of rape comments at an age when she did not really comprehend its full significance is a poignant example of how incessant and pervasive violent themes of objectification are. The women had countless stories of feeling unsafe, sometimes due to a defensive and prospectively oriented anxiety, but just as often due to the actions of men. The following discussion shows how deep the psychological scars can go:

Liz: I think every woman has this multi-layered deep sort of reservoir of memory of different sexual encounters where she's been objectified or treated improperly in some way, and so whenever someone does that to you it just taps straight in to that bag. And you're just immediately put into those feelings

Emily: Trauma

Liz: Yeah. Like fear

Liz: I always find I'm unnecessarily like, it's almost like the hairs at the back of my neck prick up and like all of a sudden I have a key in my fingers and I'm like, walking home -

Emily: Well it's just like safety, safety, I'm unsafe

Jess: And you feel like you kind of go crazy for a second you're just like, I'm just so hyper aware of everything that's going on right now and like everything's like heightened

Emily: Mmm and loud

Jess: Yeah, everything is loud and bright and I feel like everyone's trying to touch my body it's so weird

Liz: You see a shadow and you almost fucking fall over

[Laughter]

Emily: It's so true. Oh my god, I'm not even afraid of the dark but I'm always so fucking painfully, painfully scared that there's just like, a man... in my house?

Liz: The man!

Emily: And being like who the fuck is the man? Who are you? Why are you near? Why are you... It's just the idea of the man is just so fucking terrifying. The man's going to touch me, I don't like the man. Get away from me man

Liz: 'What are you worried about?' 'Oh, I'm just worried there's a man in my house.' a man! Why not a woman?

The women's history and experience with men and wider cultures of objectification and masculinity has left an indelible mark on their psyche. The way they talk about how objectification interferes in their lives directly and indirectly revolves around discourses of trauma. In fact, the psychological and physiological effects the women talk about share similarities with symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome: hypervigilance, distressing dreams, physical and mental reactions to "external clues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The threat of masculine violence, experienced first-hand in social interaction, has seen an abstraction of masculinity: a process reifying everything masculinity represents in a negative capacity and becoming a symbolic construct that represents danger, fear, and insecurity.

The discussion in FG3 demonstrated the depth in which sexism and objectification pervades their everyday lives. Their perception of being a woman was to be always on display, always accountable for their appearance, and always vulnerable.

7.2 Men's' Perceptions of Objectification

From the very outset it was clear in all the focus groups that the men had a basic theoretical understanding of objectification, but no real subjective awareness of how objectification felt. During the women's focus group there was a clear understanding of objectification from the beginning and discussions revolved around ruminations on their collective understanding. There was little debate or disagreement over what it meant. During the men's focus groups there was a definite sense of collaborative processes of

understanding occurring throughout the discussion. Most recollections of experiences of being objectified were articulated toward the latter half of the groups, after they had had time to think about their own experiences.

The experience of being objectified

The minority of men who did recount times that they felt that they had been objectified presented experiences that in some ways mirrored those of the women, but in many ways exposed a substantial break in the ways that men receive and perceive these incidents. Only two men expressed experiences of being sexually objectified in a negative light. In FG3, Trevor discussed how appreciative comments of his appearance made him feel uncomfortable and diminished:

Trevor: I feel quite uncomfortable when I get people saying nice things about my appearance. And like, it actually kind of annoys me . . . cos I think it's reductive . . . It pisses me off cos like-

Ricky: You don't find it flattering at all?

Trevor: Na. it's just like -

Ricky: Cos I wouldn't mind that

Trevor: Yeah. See I find it interesting -

Cory: Does it just bore you as well? You know, like some vain attempt at impressing you or..?

Trevor: Well, it depends on who it's from

Cory: But it just doesn't mean anything and it annoys you?

Trevor: It's reductive. It pisses me off when... like it's that whole thing you know, well I actually have a personality. You know, like, I just... there's way more to me than just the way I look . . . it takes away from all the other things about me and yeah, I feel objectified

...

Ricky: It's probably harder to talk about as a man too. You know, cos you're just like [puts on a voice] 'aw fucking . . . she reckons I'm pretty fuckin hot ay'. And it's like, er, there's more to me than that

Trevor: Yeah, but like in the same way that I might kind of like refer to an attractive girl as being kind of... she's had things easy. Like I get insecure that people would think that about me. Like, oh he's had everything easy just cos of the way he looks. Or like even like something else like the families from the upbringings you had. And then it just takes away from all the things your proud about or things that you've achieved like... yeah. But um, but your still aware of it as well.

This exchange is rich in information that demonstrates similarities and differences between how men perceive and respond to objectification. Much like the women, Trevor finds that reducing his identity to the way he looks impacts his sense of autonomy, subjectivity, and individuality. We see a pointed concern with how objectification erodes both personal and public perceptions of his abilities, accomplishments, and aptitude. These aspects of objectification are noted with the women but go further into how they are denied access to these things altogether or are seen as one small part of a bigger whole. One explanation is that these qualities are often tied to masculinity. This shifts the focus of objectification away from sex to ability. Furthermore, the anxiety that this produces is not inwardly focused. Sexual objectification theory poses that women internalize objectification and begin to view themselves in an objectified manner (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). Trevor does not demonstrate this quality, rather he projects his anxiety outward as to how others may see him as lacking in ability due to his appearance. He does not begin to question his ability or see himself as he believes others may see him. Instead he remains cognizant of his own abilities, retaining confidence and self-worth, and rails against the possibility that his objectification would have a detrimental effect on his public image.

Another telling difference between the men's and women's discussions of objectification is exemplified by the reaction of Ricky in the above exchange. There was a common thread running through FG1 and FG3 (but not FG2) where they expressed a positive reaction to hypothetical situations where they are sexually objectified by women. These responses uncover a chasm in understandings of objectification between men and women. Many of the men in the focus groups inferred or openly professed a desire to be

seen in a more sexually objectifying light by women. For these men, being objectified was understood to be a positive experience as imagined from an outside perspective. This interpretation of being on the receiving end of objectification was not based in any kind of real experience but lay more in the realm of fantasy in which women openly found them attractive and desired a sexual interaction that ignored any attempts to understand them as a subjective entity.

The only other evidence in the discussion of men feeling objectified was Howard's account of his workplace:

Howard: Yeah, I don't know, as for objectification... I work in hospitality and I... there's a lot of people I deal with. And um... I felt quite objectified recently. Like, I've overheard people, some older woman, being like 'if I was twenty years younger'. and a lot of um, gay men, they've developed a nickname for me - coffee bae - which is kind of endearing, kind of complimentary [laughter] it does make you think, I don't really want people to view me in that way. Especially when I'm doing my job, so yeah, like in the workplace I've felt that. Which is kind of unwarranted. But yeah...

Here we see a man feeling an uncomfortable level of attention leveled at his appearance and sexual appeal. The quality and intensity of the objectification he experiences demonstrates negative psychological consequences; however, the quality and degree of these consequences differs in magnitude when compared to the women. First, his negative reaction is very tepid when he describes the experience as "kind of unwarranted" and that he does not want people to perceive him in this light. This is tempered further by his perception of it being "endearing" and "complimentary". There is no sense of violation or threat, and similar to Trevor, his reaction is outwardly directed rather than inward. His sense of self-worth and subjective power is not affected. There is no evidence of Howard digesting and incorporating the objectifying gaze into his own self-image. The gaze remains outside of his subjectivity, an interaction with seemingly little consequence.

When compared to the women's accounts of being objectified, the men's experiences pale in comparison regarding the psychological and emotional effects that objectification can have. Objectification seems to have had little effect on their lives,

confined to single situational contexts that only produced a sense of annoyance or frustration.

Is Objectification Inherently Bad?

There was a clear difference in the focus groups in terms of how objectification was assessed as a moral or ethical issue. For the women, objectification was only discussed as a negative phenomenon. Any occurrence of objectification-like experiences perceived as morally or ethically unproblematic were awarded discursive distance and reframing as detached from the core of what objectification really entails. Liz gives a good account of this:

Commenting on your kind of physical appearance might be appropriate in some situations. Whereas I feel like objectification is in a sphere where you're aware that you don't have kind of the proximity with that person that that comment is ok, but you do it anyway knowing that they'll be uncomfortable because, you know, you want to comment on how they appear or whatever for, kind of [for] social gain.

Liz echoes this when asked whether strangers can appreciate each other's physical appeal without objectifying. Her response was "I think so, but I think within respectable parameters . . . not intentionally making someone uncomfortable, not like, commenting..." Both of these responses show an image of objectification as being an intentional and purposeful action committed with at least some level of knowledge that it would make the target uncomfortable. This theme of intent and purpose was consistent enough to consider that this is an important part of how women perceived objectification. On the interactive level of objectification men were perceived to be aware and cognizant of how their behavior affected women. Further, objectification was always a process of dehumanization and oppression, a tool wielded to suppress women and empower men.

The men who participated in the focus groups all had a relatively well-rounded understanding of what objectification is, what it entails, and how it is wielded in different social situations. One particular facet of objectification that was prevalent within the discussions among the men was a dispassionate, objective, and highly rational approach to objectification. When discussion was prompted towards the possibility of benign or positive forms of objectification, the men were enthusiastic in their support. Objectification was

understood, or came to be understood during the focus groups, as a relatively normal and common everyday occurrence underlined with notions of rationality, pragmatism, and problem solving.

Interviewer: On that line, largely we've talked about objectification of women. Do we think objectification occurs outside of from men to women? Do you think you objectify other people, and what ways do you do that?

Nick: Yeah, maybe in like high school, some dude in a high vis jacket, like, installing an alarm, I'd look at that person and be like he's an electrician. I'm now instantly being like, you know, just reducing and no matter what you're seeing like, if there's something that you notice on that object then you got to like associate it with your own experience of that object.

Howard: I have a feeling that the rational brain tends to objectify pretty much everything it sees instantly almost. I'm not sure if that's right, but you see something and you make some generalizations and in effect isn't that just objectifying that thing? Like attaching stereotypes and being like, that's an electrician, they probably drink Tui

Interviewer: Is there some instrumental purpose to the objectification? Is there any kind of a benefit?

Howard: I think it's like entertainment as you walk around

Alex: The electrician thing could be beneficial to you if you're looking for an electrician. But entertainment sounds like a poor excuse

Howard: Well, I feel like passing judgement like, if you're just walking along, you're going somewhere, like why do you . . . I feel like it makes you think. It's kind of entertaining just thinking about what...

There is an appeal to rational and common-sense thinking in their discussion of objectification. The idea of objectification being a natural way of organizing the world around the men was repeated in FG3:

Jim: I think you unconsciously objectify constantly . . . Like I think constantly you're making assessments of your situation. So that includes people and places and environments and all that stuff. So, you're constantly assessing everything . . . So, in a

certain case when, it's an attractive woman, it's called objectification. But if you weren't aware of that term, you're just assessing the situation. You're just going, 'this is a potential mate, this is someone I would like to share my genes with' or whatever. Because you're aware of the term objectification you realize you're objectifying that person. But instead you could say that I'm objectifying every situation. And then you could say walk into a dodgy crack den and you objectify these crack dealers and you go 'these are dangerous people' when they might not be, you don't know. You're just making the judgement

Ricky: And it fits the human condition to compartmentalize things, right? It's like the sign of the times, we like things fast, efficient, done. So moral judgement things like that it's like, if we can take someone and compartmentalize them really quickly. It's so much - better for our brain, right? It's like, we don't really... we're not really of that age now where we want a deeper, ridiculous understanding of someone. So, we want quick facts, stick it in the brain -

Jim: I want to understand the whole situation.

The men in both FG2 and FG3 both perceived objectification as a completely normal, everyday action. Objectification was a way to ward off the chaos of the world and present the world as an organized, easily understood world. Jim's account also suggests that a level of intent and self-awareness is necessary for objectification to be considered as objectification. There was further discussion of the potential benefits of objectification in highlighting the usefulness of a person in society:

Jim: We could talk about Mike [a friend and his mechanic] like that. Like, I didn't want to go to him as my mechanic because I felt bad about not hanging out with him. Like I don't want to use him as an object if I'm not going to use him as a person, you know? So, I just like don't see him anymore. So, it's like -

Ricky: I feel like that's the drug dealer dynamic that I feel like in a lot of states. You know, it's like ah, fuck I haven't seen this guy in so long...

Trevor: I don't know... I find it as a great way as we kind of become . . . more mobile economically we've got skills and stuff. It's a great way when your busy living your life to kind of involve these other people who do have these skills and it gives you like a chance to catch up with them. Like, I find it like awesome. Like, you can work together on

something cos like... I don't look at it negatively at all. I find it as like an excuse to catch up with people. Like, let's go and do this together.

Objectification is seen as a pragmatic way of navigating the social world, with people representing the skills they have to offer. But as a corollary, Trevor notes that it has an advantage of giving one an excuse to see a friend they would not have otherwise. The trait and skills focus of objectification changes perceptions from an act of disempowerment to one of utility and rational thinking. At one point, Jim talks about how important it is to have instrumental value for other people:

Jim: To be misused and abused are bad things, but to be used is good. Cos if you're not used you're useless. And then I'm like yeah and I quite often find myself going, aw that person's useless. Like, when I hang out with them I waste time, or I don't achieve things, so I think of them as useless. And not in a negative sense, but like I can't use them to gain. In like, in a selfish way I'm like when I hang out with this person the conversations that come up are repetitive, same thing reminiscing about high school whatever. And I don't find that useful.

While the women saw being valued for instrumental purposes, for the men here it is a good thing, something they strive for. There is an almost eerie similarity to a quote from Emily that came up earlier:

Emily: Cos our self-image is so intertwined with our self-worth. And if you're in a position where you're not being sexualized then you're desexualized, and that's worse. Because – no, it's not worse, but it's perceived to be worse – because it's like, well then, I'm worthless.

This is a strong example in how different women and men in these focus groups perceive life differently. The women see their value as wrapped up in their sexualization and find this to be an oppressive and hurtful reality. The men see their value as wrapped up in their usefulness and find this to be a positive and rational way of engaging with the world.

Self-Reflection and Empathy During the Research Process

The most obvious sign of how hard it is to understand a life significantly different to your own came to the fore in relation to my personal thoughts, emotions, and reactions

during FG4. The women's focus group was rife with moments that cast a light on my own inability to fully understand their perspective and position. In contrast with the men's focus groups where I found myself in most ways able to relate to their opinions and anecdotes, with the women I was confronted with an almost overwhelming sense of disconnection and distance from the lived experience they recounted.

Throughout the focus group the women described the complex ways in which a sexist and misogynistic society affected their day-to-day lives. Their positions as objectified and often dehumanized individuals reflected how women as a group are often stripped of subjectivity and reduced to objects for the use and consumption of men. During the focus group, and afterwards, I consciously tried to project myself into their position in an attempt to gain greater clarity of the experiences. For the most part, this was an unsuccessful endeavor that hammered home the incredible differences between how some men and some women experience the world. One particularly poignant moment was when they described the intense feeling of fear and insecurity they experienced when walking alone at night due to the danger that men presented to their safety. There is a wide amount of support for the idea that objectification is a key aspect involved in violence against women (Bartky 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). For these women (and many outside the focus group), walking alone at night was a risky undertaking that is avoided where possible. At the same time, the inconvenience and economic strain of either walking with company or catching a taxi means that they sometimes find themselves walking alone at night. They recounted the intense hyperawareness that they experience in these moments, a heightened sense of vulnerability that led them to assessing and evaluating any potential male threat. There were a number of strategies and techniques to aid a solo venture in the night. Some of these were simply ways of communicating that they had arrived at their destination safely such as texting a friend before they began walking and again when they got home, "just so someone is aware". Some mitigated potential danger such as walking with a key between their fingers for self-defense or having the police emergency phone number ready to go in case anything happened. These tactics show an active awareness of the need for self-preservation and safety that they feel is ordinarily lacking. Despite this, the very real threat of violence, rape, and murder weighed heavily on their minds leading to

more drastic measures undertaken to provide evidence in the potential event of falling victim to a violent crime:

Emily: I always take photos of the street. Because even if you can't see me taking the photo, it will say the location like in my photos so in case I die and somebody needs to get my phone that's like my instant thought. Or I'll screenshot google maps over and over again and just be like, if I'm dead this is where I am

Jess: One time I was walking [home] and I saw this guy coming towards me. And I literally, like, I put my fingernails in my arm to draw blood in case I needed to leave evidence. It was fucked . . . I was like, what can I do to, like, leave a trace of my body. Which is so weird to have to think about.

Examples such as this show a mixed response of outrage and resignation to their situation. While on the one hand they rile against the social conditions that make this a normal everyday occurrence, the very normality of it sees them fully considering the fact that their vulnerable position as women means the potential experience of violent offense is a very possible reality. Emily's account of taking pictures throughout her journey home and Jess's self-harm reveals a sense of resignation that, in the vulnerable position of being a woman alone at night, the risk of falling victim to violence is a normal and common thought process.

My experiences walking alone at night, unsurprisingly as a man, differ drastically to the women's accounts. I find being by myself at night enjoyable and often relish the opportunity. I regularly seek places to sit and relax for a spell in transit to simply enjoy the quiet and calm that night time presents to me. Thus, my perspective of being alone at night is a positive one, a state of being that I actively seek out rather than avoid. In an attempt to understand how the women in the focus group feel I tried to imagine what they experience and how it would affect me emotionally and psychologically. This turned out to be a fruitless endeavor as the most I could do was to relate it back to moments when I felt unsafe alone at night. While I have at times felt unsafe, the quality and quantity of these experiences is in stark contrast to the women's accounts. For me, feeling unsafe is a novelty, a handful of disparate and isolated incidents when other men's presence made me feel uncomfortable. The lived reality of constant vulnerability and fear was, due to my privileged and entitled position in society, simply impossible to imagine in any profound way. Thus, my attempt at

shared perspective taking was thwarted by my inability to infer similar scenarios from my own lived experiences.

While I was not able to cognitively empathize with the women, there was a very real emotional response to their situation. The emotional glut of anger and sadness that undergirded their accounts invoked in me strong feelings anger and sadness. Needless to say, my emotional response was not directly in line with theirs. Rather than receiving a direct line into their headspace through a conscious projection of self into another role, I was instead moved by the simple fact that they were experiencing such strong emotions. Thus, my emotions revolved around a sense of injustice and anger toward the general state of affairs, with outflows of guilt over my complicity in the gender order and sadness that they could not take part in something that I find so rewarding.

Empathy, as imaginative perspective taking, or the projection of self into a different subjective outlook seems harder the further removed said subject is from the target. Intersecting nodes of oppression highlight this incompatibility when we attempt to take a marginalized perspective from a position of privilege. This does not mean that we cannot imaginatively put ourselves in another's perspective at all. Role taking can still be a useful endeavor when attempting to compassionately consider the position someone else is in; but is only ever possible in any in-depth way when substantially different life experiences and barriers of social inequality are not present in a given situation. For example, if my friend Tracy's dog has died, I can infer back to my own memories of losing a loved pet to project myself into their position due to the similarity in our experiences. The context of gender here has little sway in how we perceive and experience this phenomenon. While this kind of role taking empathy is still never perfect, as Tracy's connection and memories of her dog will differ to my memories of my pet, the similarities are enough to be able to gain a good idea of their pain. Our connection to our pets is constructed around shared notions and values of pet ownership prevalent throughout Western society. However, if Tracy were blind and their guide dog were to pass away my ability to put myself in their position is greatly diminished due to my inability to comprehend their specific connection with said dog. There will still surely be intersecting emotions and perceptions of loss but my relationship with my dog takes on an entirely different quality. While we both may have lost an animal that we consider to be part of our family, my inability to comprehend blindness

and what a guide dog would mean in this context relegates my skills in empathy to the realm of conjecture and assumptions.

We must keep this in mind when, as men, we try to build empathetic relations both to the women around us and gender issues in general. If we attempt to project ourselves into a woman's perspective, we run the risk of imagining their situation through the lens of our own embodied lived experiences. This potentially distorts the subjective reality of experience and damages motions towards prosocial attitudes by misconstruing the intent and impact behind various forms of social interaction.

Conducting cognitive forms of empathy and fellow feeling has been argued as futile in developing a true affective sense of empathy and solidarity across divisions of power and privilege. We cannot ever truly understand the position of people whose existence differs so entirely from ours. However, this does not mean that we should throw the idea out altogether. Full cognition of another's position is impossible, yes, but this does mean we cannot attempt to try and understand at least a small part of the puzzle. Relying on only affective empathy presents a danger of a lack of engagement. Sara deTurk (2001) provides an interesting account on how empathy can work between cultures when there are distinct differences in lived experience and levels of power. Turk writes that rather than attempting to overcome differences in ontological or epistemological beliefs through access to another's inner perspective, we can build relational empathy through dialogue and sharing of stories (380). As I noted previously in the section on empathy, dialogue and conversation can serve to help each other understand one another's viewpoints without attempting to gain direct access to the experience. Most men cannot imagine what life would be like in constant fear of sexual violence, but this does not mean that we cannot learn about it, educate ourselves in the subject and hear from women's own perspective what the experience is like.

I can recall an example of this from my own experience. A few years ago, a group of friends and I participated in a local event called "14 hours homeless" organized by local charities that engaged in particular aspects of support for Wellington's homeless population. My general understanding going into the event was for people to gather together and sleep outside for one night on boxes or similar scrap materials in order to

experience what it felt like and raise money for the charities to help support the homeless population. This aspect of the event was severely limited in building a sense of cognitive empathy for the plight of the homeless. While the night was uncomfortable and cold (even in my expensive winter clothes), and it was difficult to drown out the noises of the city (despite listening to music on my smartphone), my limited experience of 'suffering' was in actuality an enjoyable social time with friends that involved a very superficial abstaining of privilege. It was clear, however, that the organizers were not trying to show us what homelessness was really like. Their intent was to educate us about homelessness and why it was an important cause. Other than the sleeping part of the night, we spent a couple hours in groups going to different seminars or presentations by people both working in the charities, and homeless people involved with the charities. This part of the night was incredibly beneficial in developing empathy as they explained the social processes that influenced homelessness, the nuances and qualities of different types of homelessness, and told us stories of personal lived experiences of homelessness. The affective engagement was strong as we digested just how much these people endured, but we always retained a distance from ourselves and the homeless others. In fact, there were repeated inferences to how those of us who had never experienced homelessness could not hope to fully conceive of what it was like to live it. The power of the event was in the way it evoked a strong sense of empathy and compassion for the homeless, while at the same time giving us a crash course education that helped build an idea of what homelessness is and what it entails. Thus, we were taught what homelessness is, not what homelessness is like. In discussing this I wish to highlight the virtues of helping build a cognitive framework of what the experiences of different social groups are through engagement with those in the groups. With this framework we can utilize a limited sense of cognitive empathy that identifies the realities of other people's suffering but falls short of fully projecting ourselves into their roles. This can help flesh out our sense of affective empathy for others in ways that allow us to engage with their situations with compassion.

Chapter 8. Masculinity and Objectification: Where do we go from here?

This thesis has undertaken a phenomenological analysis of young men and women to elucidate on contemporary changes in the management and performance of masculinity today. Using empirical focus group work, I have attempted to shed light on how objectification is used as a masculine technique of power, the contexts and environments that encourage this, and the effects it has on women. I have also examined how men and women both understand and perceive objectification on a phenomenological level. Through this research I aimed to examine and expand upon existing literature relating to masculinity and objectification, as well as propose useful steps we can take to deconstruct harmful behaviors and create more prosocial and inclusive ways to interact.

8.1 Summary

Chapter 2 outlined two main strands of theory that provides the basis for my research. I introduced contemporary theories of masculinity and framed it within a debate between three major theoretical models: hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005); inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson 2009); and hybrid masculinity theory (Demetriou 2001; Bridges & Pascoe 2014). I also explored philosophical and sociological thought about objectification, providing a model of objectification that I use as a lens to analyze masculinity today, in New Zealand. I finished with a brief outline of prevailing concepts of empathy in context to my research.

Chapter 3 introduces key methodological concepts at the core of my work. *Interpretive phenomenological analysis* is utilized as the key methodological framework for my analysis. This approach highlights my focus on how participants consciously experience and reflect upon aspects of their lives. *Feminist standpoint theory* provides the epistemological and ontological approach to my thesis. This describes the importance of positionality and situated knowledge when undergoing research. I explore how this can be used to create a meaningful reflexive masculine standpoint in the context of gender studies that aims to mitigate the distorted world view that comes with privilege, and work towards deepening skills in critical self-reflection to help us understand the world around us. I also discuss the methods used to gain data for my analysis. I conducted four focus groups containing established friend groups with 22 participants in total. Three of these focus

groups were with men and one was with women. One of the men's focus groups was conducted with my own personal group of friends in which I included myself as a participant.

Chapters 4 & 5 discuss data obtained from a focus group conducted with my own personal circle of friends (FG1) to unpack our collective performance of objectification. Using Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification, I deconstruct how code words are used as a kind of game in which we objectify women for the express purpose of bolstering our own personal masculine identity within the group, as well as building and managing bonds between members. I then explore how we understand and talk about the women we have relationships with as symbolic markers of a successful masculinity that signify our sexual competence, authority, and ability to take control of our lives. I also discuss how our actions in both chapters 4 and 5, though not transgressing into more violent forms of objectification, serve to bolster rape culture and men's power within society.

Chapter 6 contrasts an apparent split between the group dynamic of FG1 that fits the traits of hegemonic masculinity, compared to FG2 and FG3 which are more closely aligned with hybrid or inclusive forms of masculinity. I find that context and history of the friendships between the focus group participants closely influence whether masculinity is performed in more positive or negative forms. Homosocial friend groups that develop due to forced interaction within institutions such as school or work seem to use questionable activities such as objectification to help build a cohesive sense of group identity. The men whose friendship developed over a long period of time tend to move away from these activities as deeper and more profound connections are made. I also discuss how the introduction of a gay friend to FG2 and FG3 influenced the other men into being more reflexive and compassionate in their gender performance. These factors allow for more supportive forms of interaction that prioritize emotion and intimacy.

Chapter 7 discusses data obtained from the men's focus groups as well as the women's focus group to analyze how women and men experience and understand objectification. Using Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) objectification theory, I examined how a culture of objectification creates substantial feelings of shame and anxiety for women. I then contrasted these accounts with how the men experience objectification, homing in on

how different lived experiences lead to contrasting views. Empathy is then explored as a necessary skill to develop to help bridge these gaps and foster more prosocial behavior among men. I propose that differences in lived experience mean that cognitive or role-taking forms of empathy are inadequate to fully meet this goal. Instead we should focus on building affective and compassionate forms of empathy that promotes emotional resonance without seeking to fully understand another's reality.

8.2 Deductions

The findings of this thesis are wide and varied. Here I will briefly consider two of the most important ones: the potential of Martha Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification, and the debate between hybrid and inclusive theories of masculinity (Anderson 2008; Bridges & Pascoe 2014).

Objectification

While aspects of our culture are slowly shifting as feminism and other social and cultural theories aimed at promoting radical social change are digested by society, objectification retains its position as a potent technique of power which men can use to solidify their dominance. The amorphous and sometimes indistinct nature of objectification makes it incredibly important to develop theoretical frameworks with which we can better understand when and how it is enacted. Martha Nussbaum's (1995) theory of objectification serves an important purpose in this regard. This thesis demonstrates two powerful aspects of her theory. First, by breaking down objectification into multiple categories, Nussbaum has presented us a lens through which we can analyze and interpret this phenomenon. Analyzing acts of objectification in this way allows us to comprehend multiple dynamics at play within any specific circumstance. Second, Nussbaum's theory allows us to compare different cases of objectification. As shown in *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5*, objectification can manifest in very different forms. Breaking each example down into its various forms, we can conduct comparative analyses that highlight differences in the dynamics of each case.

Nussbaum's theory is not a perfect authoritative definition of objectification. Its potential comes from the way that it can be utilized as a practical and effective framework with which to analyze objectification. Furthermore, it serves as a basis which can be

developed and augmented as theories of objectification evolve. This can be seen in Rae Langton's (2009) work that embellishes upon many points made by Nussbaum, while at the same time proposing more categories that can be employed. My research has shown the possibility of adapting Nussbaum's theorization to "real life" empirical research.

Masculinity

As for the socio-cultural construction of masculinity, the ongoing debate between hegemonic, inclusive, and hybrid masculinity is far from settled. My research shows that aspects of each are prevalent within each focus group studied. When looking at the focus group data from FG1, FG2 and FG3, it is important to balance findings of both inclusive masculinity and hybrid masculinity to better identify the trends and changing behaviors of men. Both have valid findings that deserve attention, while at the same time promote somewhat generalizing approaches to critical studies of masculinity. Inclusive masculinity promotes a positive and optimistic view of how masculinity is transforming to incorporate historically disparaged forms of gender performance. In many ways, the scholars who advocate this view have correctly identified trends that should be nurtured and bolstered. The breakdown in stoicism and emotional repression seems to be moving toward a new model of masculinity that embraces emotive and empathic sharing between men, and this is apparent in this study and empirically validated across a range of different research projects. Emotional and intimately tactile displays between men are a good thing and create a significantly more prosocial environment for men to develop their identities and consequent behaviors and attitudes in forms that help subvert some of the more insidious traits historically associated with masculinity. The inculcation of feminism in society shows that men can approach gender, at least at a conceptual level, in more reflexive and critical ways.

Inclusive masculinity has much to offer, however as a comprehensive reworking of Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity it is sorely lacking. The issue with inclusive masculinity is in its naive and premature statement that these findings signify a sea change in gender relations in toto, and that masculinity is on a strong path towards equality. This is exactly what hybrid masculinity contends: the diversification of masculinity and its appropriation of more 'inclusive' forms of gender performance sustain the social dominance

of men by adapting to new cultural milieu in ways that respond to social critique without destabilizing our disproportionate position in society. As I have argued, this is an important issue to consider when discussing positive changes in masculinity. The trends that inclusive masculinity rightly identifies as positive changes are beneficial mainly to men. Men's ability to be emotionally open and perform their gender in more inclusive forms give men wider access to prosocial activity but does not, as consequence, necessarily advance gender equality. Thus, privileged men enjoy a sense of liberation from the confines of traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity, while at the same time retaining the benefits of associated with it. Given these reservations, I am inclined to side with hybrid masculinity as a model in which to critically evaluate men's behavior. The only point I take issue with regarding hybrid masculinity is, in contrast to inclusive masculinity, its arguably pessimistic account of contemporary masculinity. Hybrid theory tends to paint any potentially positive change in masculinity as only signifying a superficial veneer that obscures the continued existence of gender inequality. Positive changes in masculinity do indeed obscure gender inequality and it is important to cast suspicion on these as manipulative techniques of power, but this does not mean that we should treat these changes only as suspicious and manipulative techniques of power. Hybrid masculinity runs the risk of implicitly over-generalizing new forms of gender performance as inherently negative. Positive and negative conceptions of masculinity are not mutually exclusive; in fact, I argue they are in many ways mutually constitutive. The development of new and more prosocial forms of masculinity hold potential for the development of more equitable gender relations if they are explicitly framed within an intersectional feminist gender politics' focus on oppression and marginalization. This approach can champion changes in masculinity while at the same time deconstructing the ways in which these changes fail to subvert men's dominance.

8.3 Suggestions for further research

Hybrid vs. Inclusive Masculinity Debate

The criticism levelled at inclusive masculinity is valid and necessary. But before I completely throw away the theory, I believe it is possible to find value in its intent and hypotheses. Rather than using inclusive masculinity as a theoretically-grounded-in-reality analysis of contemporary society, it can be useful when considered as a form of utopian

thinking. Theorizing inclusive masculinity in this way serves to present us a model of the future of which we can conduct in-depth analyses and criticisms to highlight potential issues that may crop up when moving toward real political action. I refer to Ruth Levitas' (2007) idea of utopia as method to develop this idea. Levitas (2007, 303) writes that "[a]ny actual imaginary reconstitution of society must fail adequately to articulate the desire for a better life, and is also bound to fail, even at the practical level, to resolve all present problems without producing new ones". Utopia is understood as a "method of considering the future, not the stipulation of a goal" (Levitas 2007, 303) and this is where inclusive masculinity falls flat. Anderson and his contemporaries use empirical data that shows the softening of masculinity and the diminishment of homophobia as precursors of a utopian model of the future without adequately considering the nuances of gender inequality. Were we to develop a political or social movement out of the philosophy and logic of inclusive masculinity I think we would run a significant risk of increasing gender inequality by tackling social issues as they pertain only to men. We can salvage this if we view inclusive masculinity through the lens of Levitas' idea of utopia as a "necessary failure" (2007, 304). Inclusive masculinity provides a model which we can analyze to better understand how the vision depicted will inevitably fail and subsequently address the issues brought to light. This is already happening to some extent through the increase of hybrid theories of masculinity put forth as rebuttals to inclusive masculinity's theoretical and methodological frameworks. To this extent I believe inclusive masculinity and similar optimistic approaches deserve more attention; but need to be approached as a necessary failure to combat any ideological alignment which potentially transforms it from a reflexive consideration of the future into a political stipulation of goals and achievements. I am sure that proponents of inclusive masculinity would bridle at this appropriation of their ideas, but I stand by it nonetheless.

Towards a phenomenology of a (pro)feminist Consciousness

Sandra Bartky (1975) has written of the experience of developing a feminist consciousness. Written during a time when feminism had not yet become a feature of a substantial set of men's psyches, Bartky outlines the many changes and epiphanies that a woman goes through when developing a feminist consciousness. Here, as both an exercise in thought and suggestion for future, I would like to undertake a critical rereading of one of her seminal works – "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness" – with what it

means for a male identified person to develop their own feminist consciousness. Keeping in mind the importance of lived experience, situated knowledge, and feminist standpoint theory, I believe we can deconstruct the powerful messages stated in Bartky's work and reconstruct them detailing what it means to be a male feminist.

Bartky's work explores the phenomenological experience of developing a feminist consciousness (FC). She, while recognizing the limits of her ability to speak for all women, proposes "a tentative attempt at a morphology of feminist consciousness . . . I shall try to identify some structural features of that altered way of apprehending oneself and the world which is both product and content of a raised consciousness" (Bartky 1975, 426). This development of consciousness brings with it a wealth of psychological effects that induce both confusion and strife, while at the same time raise possibilities for optimism and hope for the individual who experiences it. To be a man and develop a feminist consciousness parallels many of the features that Bartky lays out. However, there are undeniable differences in perspectives, emphases, and lived experiences that mean we need to reformulate the morphology presented to us in her work. We need to develop a framework for masculine feminist consciousness (MFC) raising that complements women's experience, while at the same time specifies considering the positionality of men in society. To do this we need to ask some questions: What does an altered perception of oneself mean for a masculine feminist and how do we conceptualize ourselves considering this altered perception? What structural elements are we directly affected by that put us in our position in society? What personal changes, both psychological and grounded in the physical reality of interaction, do we need to make which will allow us to be a feminist advocate in the world? The exercise in thought I engage in here proposes a fundamental shift in men's perception of the world and the ways in which we relate to it. I propose a need for intense and vigorous self-reflection, an embracement of relentless self-criticism that will inevitably induce much anxiety and guilt upon men who develop a MFC. While the proposed features of an MFC will be unattractive to many men, it is our belief that a masculine feminist consciousness is a guilty conscience, a growing awareness of the often-overwhelming ways in which all men are implicated in gender inequality, whether through active and overt performances of misogyny, or through passive receivership of male privilege. My proposal, however, is not designed to be a punishment of men. I believe that through the

development of an MFC, men can both begin to overcome the complex layers of sexist behaviors while at the same time deconstruct toxic aspects of masculinity, which, again through the development of an MFC and the end goal of gender equality, will lead to greater quality of life for both men and women.

Bartky (1975, 426) claims that “to become a feminist is to develop a radically altered consciousness of oneself, of others and of what for lack of a better term, I shall call “social reality.” Bartky pays particular attention to “contradictions” in society, ways of social interaction and organization that are often perceived as normal and natural, but in the process of developing a FC are exposed as oppressive and illegitimate forces that privilege some over others. As long as women apprehend their social reality as “natural, inevitable and inescapable”, a FC is not formed. FC is “the experience in a certain way of certain specific contradictions in the social order . . . the feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable, as to be rejected in behalf of a transforming project for the future” (Bartky 1975, 429). In this sense, Bartky (1975, 429) proposes that the development of FC is not merely the awareness of inequality, but the apprehension of “a genuine possibility for the partial or total liberation of women”. She eloquently frames feminists as “not aware of different things than other people; they are aware of the same things differently. Feminist consciousness, it might be ventured, turns a “fact” into a “contradiction”” (Bartky 1975, 429).

How do we develop a MFC along the same lines as this, given that men have a vested interest in keeping the status quo with all the privilege and power that comes along with it? Bartky’s Marxist analysis of the development of a collective consciousness of the marginalized and oppressed is based around the growing resentment and agitation for change sparked within these specific subsets of society. While there are many obstacles in the way to developing this same consciousness in men, we can identify two motivating factors which can help develop a MFC dedicated to social activism and equality. First, and admittedly this has been tested to no great success throughout the history of feminism, we need to appeal to the moral and ethical psyche of men. We need to understand that, just because we are privileged this does not mean we can sit back and rest on our laurels. We need to also admit that changes in the system will take away much of the privilege given to us, or at least that which is directly tied to the oppression of others. The difficulty here is

that when women “apprehend certain features of social reality as intolerable, as to be rejected in behalf of a transforming project for the future” (Bartky 1975, 429), men will quite possibly see this social reality as incredibly tolerable, desired even. Thus, to reject the status quo in pursuit of equality will inevitably lead to a loss of power for men, both structurally and in the day-to-day life of men who actively adopt a different approach to how they conduct themselves. I believe that this can be somewhat cushioned by the second motivating factor, that gender equality will benefit men in numerous other ways. This has become a stock standard response to critics of feminism who label it as man-hating or misandrist, a prominent theme among resurgent anti-feminist ideologies found amongst groups of (mostly) men such as the alt-right or neo-conservative hate groups that have proliferated with the advent of the digital age. I believe that the development of an MFC will not only expose the structural and interactional contradictions forced upon women and the ways in which men are culpable in their reproduction but will help men understand the ways in which the patriarchal gender order imposes damaging and contradictory expectations on what it means to ‘be a man’.

8.4 Concluding Comments

The objectification of others is not likely to disappear from the way that we conduct ourselves within society. The sheer chaos and complexity of social life means that we cannot fully appreciate every individual’s subjectivity in every circumstance and situation in a profound and meaningful way. What we can change is the way that we objectify each other. Not fully appreciating the subjectivity of one another does not mean that we actively diminish or damage their humanity. Objectification is harmful when it is enmeshed within unequal relations of power that privilege some over others. The inclusive/hybrid masculinity debate discussed in this thesis highlights how changing dynamics within masculinity have had some positive consequences in producing more compassionate attitudes within men, although the steps forward have been small and remain hindered by the ways in which we transform how we manage and maintain our power to consolidate our privileged position and thus continue the status quo.

Through the research undertaken in this thesis it has become apparent that masculinity studies need to strengthen and stretch its theoretical scope to better critique

current gender issues. The theory of hegemonic masculinity has been a ground-breaking stepping stone in the ways that we understand gender dynamics, yet it is becoming increasingly in need of revision to keep up with contemporary changes in its structure. Hybrid masculinity, and to a lesser extent inclusive masculinity, have produced many great insights into these changes but they are both lacking in many respects.

Positive social changes are occurring, despite constraint by the persistence of existing social structures. If we wish to see these changes realized, we need to be wary and critical of the process as it unfolds. As men, we need to develop much stronger skills in empathy and compassion as we interact with the world around us.

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Appendices



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MEMORANDUM

TO	David Benge
COPY TO	Mr Dylan Taylor
FROM	AProf Susan Corbett, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	18 July 2016
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 23020 Construction of Masculinity and Collective Performance

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 14 October 2016. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards



Susan Corbett
Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

MEMORANDUM

TO	Dave Bengé
COPY TO	Rhonda Shaw
FROM	AProf Susan Corbett, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	15 June 2017
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 24801 Masculinity and Objectification

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 3 March 2018. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards



Susan Corbett
 Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee



Construction of Masculinity and Collective Performances

CONSENT TO FOCUS GROUP

This consent form will be held for 2 years.

Researcher: David Benge, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington

By signing this form I acknowledge that:

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio focus group.

I understand that:

- The information I have provided will be destroyed 2 years after the research is finished.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor. I understand that the results will be used for an Honours report and a summary of the results may be used in academic reports and/or presented at conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.
- *[OR]* I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to me in any reports on this research: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

Construction of Masculinity and Collective Performances

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

Who am I?

My name is David Benge and I am an Honours student in Sociology at Victoria University of Wellington. The research I am proposing to undertake will contribute to my research report.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is designed to explore contemporary debates and theory around gender, specifically masculinity. Through focus groups and interviews, this study will examine how men formulate their own ideas and identities around masculinity. Further, the research conducted will focus on the ways that men express these ideas to and with other men. I will be a participant in this research myself. Through reflecting on how masculinity is performed, it is hoped that this research will contribute toward more equal gender relations. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting six to ten male friends of mine, between the ages of 18 to 30, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in an hour long focus group. After this has been completed one or two participants will be asked to take part in a half-hour interview. Permission will be asked to record the focus group and interview. Participants will receive a draft of the project before the final report is submitted to the university. Any section of the draft including data provided by the participant will be highlighted so that they can confirm that they are happy with the inclusion of this information

How can you help?

If you agree to take part I will conduct a focus group, and possibly an interview, with your participation. I will ask you questions about gender and masculinity. The focus group will take one hour. The interview, if you are asked to give one and accept the invitation, will take 30 minutes. I will record the interview and focus group and write a transcript later. You can withdraw from the interview or focus group at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by the 7th of October, 2016. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. I will not name you in any reports, and I will not include any information that would identify you (such as age) unless I have acquired consent directly from you. Only my supervisor, Dylan Taylor, and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 2 years after the research ends.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Honours research report. You will not be identified in my report. I may also use the results of my research for conference presentations, and academic articles. I will take care not to identify you in any presentation or article.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you do not want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study up until four weeks after your interview;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording (if it is recorded);
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;
- agree on another name for me to use rather than your real name;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:

Name: David Bengé

University email address:

bengedavi@myvuw.ac.nz

Phone: 0273931255

Supervisor:

Name: Dylan Taylor

Role: Lecturer

School: Victoria University of Wellington

Location: Room 1012, Murphy Building,
Kelburn Pde, Kelburn Campus

Email: dylan.taylor@vuw.ac.nz

Phone: 04 463 5471



Masculinity & Objectification

INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

Who am I?

My name is David Benge and I am a Masters student in Sociology at Victoria University of Wellington. The research I am proposing to undertake will contribute to my thesis.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is designed to explore contemporary debates and theory around gender, specifically masculinity and objectification. Through focus groups and interviews, this study will examine how men formulate their own ideas and identities around masculinity, and ways in which objectification can be a gendered performance. Further, the research conducted will focus on the ways that men express these ideas to and with other men. I will be a participant in this research and will actively involve myself within the discussion. Through reflecting on how masculinity is performed, it is hoped that this research will contribute toward more equal gender relations. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting six to ten men, between the ages of 18 to 30, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in a one and a half hour long focus group. After this has been completed one or two participants may be invited to take part in a half-hour interview at a later date. Permission will be asked to record the focus group on audio and video. This is to analyse both what we say and to see how we physically compose ourselves and interact with others during the discussion.

How can you help?

If you agree to take part I will conduct a focus group with your participation. I will ask you questions about gender, masculinity, and objectification. The focus group will take one and a half hours. I will record the focus group and write a transcript later. You can leave during the focus group at any time without giving a reason, however you cannot withdraw data gained during your time in the focus group if you opt to leave.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. I will not name you in any reports, and I will not include any information that would identify you (such as age). Only my supervisor, Rhonda Shaw, and possibly a professional transcriber will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 3 years after the research ends. Any images or footage from the video recordings will be de-identified to protect your anonymity

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Master's thesis. You will not be identified in my report. I may also use the results of my research for conference presentations, and academic articles. I will take care not to identify you in any presentation or article.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you do not want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the focus group;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview or focus group recording;
- read over and comment on a written summary or transcript of the focus group;
- agree on another name for me to use rather than your real name;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:

Name: David Benge

Email: david.benge@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Rhonda Shaw

Role: Associate Professor

School: Victoria University of Wellington

Location: Room 1007, Murphy Building,
Kelburn Pde, Kelburn Campus

Email: rhonda.shaw@vuw.ac.nz

Phone: 04 463 6134

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett. Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.



Masculinity & Objectification

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part, thank you for considering my request.

Who am I?

My name is David Benge and I am a Master's student in Sociology at Victoria University of Wellington. The research I am proposing to undertake will contribute to my research report.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is designed to explore contemporary debates and theory around gender, specifically masculinity and objectification. Through focus groups and interviews, this study will examine how men formulate their own ideas and identities around masculinity, and ways in which objectification can be a gendered performance. Further, the research conducted will focus on the ways that men express these ideas to and with other men. I am also interested in hearing about thoughts, opinions, and experiences of objectification from women's perspective which can help bring insight to some of the consequences of these types of behaviour. Through reflecting on how masculinity is performed, it is hoped that this research will contribute toward more equal gender relations. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting six to ten women, between the ages of 18 to 30, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in a one and a half hour long focus group. Permission will be asked to record the focus group both on audio.

How can you help?

If you agree to take part I will conduct a focus group with your participation. I will ask you questions about gender, masculinity, and objectification. The focus group will take one and a half hours. I will record the focus group and write a transcript later. You can leave during the focus group at any time without giving a reason, however you cannot withdraw data gained during your time in the focus group if you opt to leave.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is confidential. I will not name you in any reports, and I will not include any information that would identify you (such as age). Only my supervisor, Rhonda Shaw, and possibly a professional

transcriber will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed 3 years after the research ends.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my Master's thesis. You will not be identified in my report. I may also use the results of my research for conference presentations, and academic articles. I will take care not to identify you in any presentation or article.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you do not want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the focus group;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;
- agree on another name for me to use rather than your real name;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Student:

Name: David Benge

University email address:

david.benge@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Rhonda Shaw

Role: Associate Professor

School: Victoria University of Wellington

Location: Room 1007, Murphy Building,
Kelburn Pde, Kelburn Campus

Email: rhonda.shaw@vuw.ac.nz

Phone: 04 463 6134

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett. Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.



Construction of Masculinity and Collective Performances

CONSENT TO FOCUS GROUP

This consent form will be held for 3 years.

Researcher: David Benge, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington

By signing this form I acknowledge that:

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in a focus group recorded on audio and video.

I understand that:

- The information I have provided will be destroyed 3 years after the research is finished.
- Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor. I understand that the results will be used for a Master's thesis and a summary of the results may be used in academic reports and/or presented at conferences.
- My name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.
- I would like a transcript of the focus group: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a summary of the project once completed: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

ADVERTISEMENT

WANTED: PARTICIPANTS FOR FOCUS GROUPS ABOUT MASCULINITY AND OBJECTIFICATION

My name is David Benge and I am currently doing my Master's in Sociology at Victoria University. My thesis focuses on aspects of masculinity and objectification, and hopes to contribute to contemporary discussions of gender equality. I am looking for participants aged between 18-30 to agree to undertake a one to two hour long focus group about masculinity and objectification. I am looking for two groups of 4-8 men and one group of 4-8 women. I wish to conduct these focus groups with established friend groups, so if you are keen and know a few friends who might be willing to help out please get in touch! If you are keen to be involved just individually please also contact me. There is also the possibility of undertaking a one on one interview after the conclusion of the focus group at a later date. Interview participants will be given a \$20 gift card to thank them for their time. I will provide some snacks and refreshments for the focus groups.

This research has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University (*Application #24801 – approved 15/06/2017*)

Contact: david.benge@vuw.ac.nz

Resources and Contacts

Lifeline New Zealand (suicide prevention)

www.lifeline.org.nz

To speak to a counsellor please phone one of our free 24/7 helplines:

[24/7 Helpline](#) | [0800 LIFELINE \(0800 54 33 54\)](#)

[Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) | [0508 TAUTOKO \(0508 82 88 65\)](#)

Women's Refuge (domestic violence)

www.womensrefuge.org.nz

Crisis support line: 0800 REFUGE or 0800 733 843

Wellington Rape Crisis

Phone: (04) 801 8973

support@wellingtonrapecrisis.org.nz

Wellington Help (sexual abuse)

www.wellingtonhelp.org.nz

24/7 Crisis Support Line: 04 801 6655 and push '0' at the menu.

Central Region Eating Disorder Service

<http://www.creds.org.nz/>