

This essay considers possible forms of male feminist knowledge and their implications for male feminist theory and practice. It seems to me that feminist insights into the standpoint-specificity of knowledges, the formation of identities within patriarchy, and the contradictory character of feminist consciousness together should provoke some wariness toward men claiming a feminist commitment. While it is important for men to take feminism seriously, recognize their own roles in sexist privilege and oppression, and work for change, men have to face the extent to which fighting patriarchy means fighting themselves. They can chip away at their sexist inclinations, temper egregious habits, and make sacrifices born of a commitment to ending patriarchal oppression. **But even if men become part of the solution and find rewards in this role, we shouldn't deceive ourselves that we can cease being part of the problem.** This is a deeply upsetting situation for those of us who wish to live decent lives, and nobody likes continually to be upset; such aversion helps to explain various forms of bad faith and self-deception that beset putatively feminist men.

Several concerns motivate this essay. First, like many men who call themselves 'feminist', 'pro-feminist', or 'anti-sexist', I'm uncertain about what living up to this commitment would mean, and doubt that I live up to it very adequately. I wish to address this uncertainty, and to **reflect more broadly upon how people on the advantaged end of a social hierarchy - a system of exploitation or oppression - can get a grip on what this position demands of them and negotiate these demands** (which can at times seem so far-reaching as to leave one at a political and motivational impasse). So there are analogies between this discussion of male feminism and quandaries around being white in a society of racial privilege, well-fed, clothed, and housed in a world where this is exceptional, and so on. A second motivation to write about male feminism as oxymoron comes from observing putatively feminist men - being a putatively feminist man - in an academic context. At institutions where I've studied and worked, men have on the whole been welcomed as teachers, students, and scholars of feminism. Female undergraduates in feminism classes seem to devote considerable energy, for example, to making sure that their comments don't threaten or reflect badly on those male peers who are not overtly sexist. And the feminist engagement of male academics usually is welcomed by their female colleagues. Yet it has been my observation that men in the academy who call themselves feminists, teach feminist work, and write on feminist themes very often stray from these commitments in interactions with female students and colleagues, and in their decisions as privileged members of institutional hierarchies. In what follows I try to understand the pervasiveness of this slippage between male academics' professed feminist commitments and their everyday personal, pedagogical, and political behaviors. [2] A third motivation for writing about male feminism is to explore the possibility of **strong but non-essentialist generalizations about gender**. There is an increasing tendency among philosophers and political theorists to be skeptical toward claims about identities or understandings shared by members of any given group, for such claims always mask a great deal of complexity and contradiction. Yet there are real tensions between this critical disposition, with its postmodern inflections, and the demands of a transformative politics. **Now the theoretical escape from this dilemma is to defend generalizations about social groups pragmatically, as claims for particular purposes.** But it's one thing to do this in the abstract, another actually to work through the appropriateness of generalizations in particular contexts. In what follows I seek to defend generalizations about men and feminism, notwithstanding my acute awareness of the contingency and limitations of generalizations about gender identities. I am well aware that gender is a construct, that masculinity and femininity do not reliably line up with sexed bodies, that there are subject positions that complicate sexual as well as gender dimorphism, and that identities cannot in fact be segmented into their constituent parts. [3] But it is my contention that notwithstanding their imperfect fit with real-world complexity, my generalizations about men and women do useful work in the contexts I specify. **Those who would challenge such generalizations must do more than point to exceptions, or to complexities of identity that I concede from the start; they need to engage with the practical intent of the generalizations, showing how they fail to give us a useful grip on the issues at hand.** All of that to say that a further reason for writing about the politics and ethics of men's feminism is to defend the usefulness of a set of generalizations about gender, and so demonstrate a pragmatic response to methodological questions about essentialism, anti-essentialism, postmodernism, and political practice.

This essay is meant to be a skeptical intervention on the issue of men doing feminism, but not a pessimistic one. Men are capable of deepening their understandings of feminism and making this knowledge operative in their personal, social, and political lives. Many men struggle with the personal and political challenges described in the essay, with important and worthwhile results. **My point is**

that a particular kind of awareness of contradiction is necessary for male feminists adequately to grasp the transformations to which they might aspire, and the sorts of complacency and bad faith they should resist.

The argument proceeds as follows. I begin by stipulating definitions of patriarchy and feminism, then review ways in which women develop and appropriate feminist knowledge given experiences of patriarchal oppression. Against this background, I turn to the central questions of the essay: In what ways can men understand feminist analyses, and what kinds of transformation of consciousness and action are likely to attach to this knowledge? I draw critically upon Sandra Harding's work to consider the very possibility of male feminist knowledge. I then discuss what a man with a thorough understanding of feminism would know about himself, and the discomforts and obligations that would attach to this knowledge. This brings us to a discussion not of possibility but probability: what forms and degrees of feminist engagement are typical of academic men who would claim this label, given the rewards and punishments attached to various paths? I describe the motivations underlying four ideal-typical male feminist stances, **those of the poseur, the insider, the humanist, and the self-flagellator**. I conclude with some thoughts on how **tolerance for complexity, mutual criticism, and activist community together help academic men get past these four detours**, toward a more adequate **though still oxymoronic male feminism**.

### Patriarchy and feminism

For the purposes of this essay, I will stipulate definitions of patriarchy and feminism: these will not be uncontroversial, but should be recognizable as lying on the radical/socialist end of a spectrum of feminisms. I would argue - but here simply assert - that we (North Americans, say) live in societies defined by structured inequalities of group-based power, with privilege and oppression defined along lines that include race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These oppressions intersect and interlock in complex ways, and one must be cautious in segmenting them for analytical or political purposes. [4] Yet in spite of the tendentiousness of generalizations about particular social groups - such generalizations never capture complex intersections, nor the nuanced differences among sub-groups and individuals - these generalizations are politically indispensable. [5] **Patriarchy names one such generalization, describing structured inequalities of power between men and women, wherein men are oppressors and women oppressed**. For the purposes at hand, we need to notice three aspects of patriarchal power. (i) Patriarchal power structures the interactions of men and women in virtually every sphere of life; it affects prospects and treatment in public life, in civil society, in the workplace, the street, the home, the bedroom. (ii) Patriarchal power not only defines a set of external forces that privilege or constrain us as men and women, but also conditions our deepest understandings, affects, and habits. Every person's story is different, **but structures of gender and gendered power produce patterns of identity** and behavior that make gender dualism useful as a term of social and political analysis. (iii) Patriarchal power benefits men and harms women - not without important variations and interesting wrinkles, but on the whole. Among patriarchal harms are those of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence; differences in wages and career prospects; the devaluation of women's ideas and speech in a wide variety of institutional settings, including the workplace and the political sphere; family structures and laws that rely upon women's unpaid domestic labour while offering them less protection when marriages end. This list could go on and on. And for most if not all of these harms there are corresponding privileges for men - access to women's sex-affective production, privileges granted in the workplace, disproportionate credibility attached to one's statements in a number of domains; this list, too, can be extended a very long way. Now the **benefits of patriarchy are not evenly distributed among men, nor its harms among women**: here, **intersections with other forms of oppression and social stratification are key**. [6] But I would defend **the generalization that patriarchy does more harm than good to individual women, and more good than harm to individual men**. The generalization holds particularly well when it comes to the group that I have most directly in view in this essay: men in the academy, who are mainly white, mainly middle class, and mainly straight. Where patriarchy denotes a system of gendered power, feminism describes a structured analysis of this system, and a commitment to anti-patriarchal resistance and transformation. **Feminism is among other things a form of knowledge**, with three domains that correspond to the dimensions of patriarchal power described above. That is, feminism describes a structured understanding of (i) power relations that lie outside oneself, (ii) how patriarchy also shapes one's own identity, and (iii) harms and privileges that correlate with patriarchal power, in one's own life and in society at large. **Feminist knowledge is transformative**: 'getting it' means no longer being able to see or live your life in the same manner. It is to reinterpret your history and identity in ways that can be profoundly uncomfortable, and also to reinterpret your place in the world in ways that permit and demand new forms of action. There are, of course, ways of engaging with

feminist theory and ideology that don't amount to 'getting it' in this transformative sense. I'll refer to this variation as concerning the depth of feminist knowledge. Those of us who have taught feminism will be especially aware of shallow ways of engaging with the theory. I have had students, for example, who show adeptness at rehearsing the propositional content of Catharine MacKinnon's account of eroticized domination, yet without appearing to have turned her critique upon their own gendered selves; or who talk about their own gendered socialization in radical terms, but without appearing to sense how much of their lives this analysis might throw into question. I don't want to say that such students haven't understood MacKinnon, for they seem to have understood her as well as they might Mill or Rawls. But they seem to have engaged with MacKinnon's work as propositional knowledge only, without taking her views as possibly speaking profoundly to themselves, to privileges and harms in their own lives and the lives of those around them, and to changes the analysis enables or requires. Now the 'they' I have in mind in this vignette are, much more often than not, men. Is this surprising? Or is something more than chance reflected in the gender of those whose knowledge of feminism fails to extend to careful and prolonged reflection on themselves, and to corollary changes in behavior? Something more than chance is involved; to see why, we need to **look at the experiences that men and women bring to their engagements with feminist theories and ideologies**. I will contend that the **distinctive standpoint and experiences of men militates against their knowing feminism in a deep way**: at best, men can strain to keep feminist insights in view and to act on these - straining against deeply internalized propensities that are non-feminist, and against the temptation to treat gendered privileges as just deserts. Often, putatively feminist academic men find these sorts of strains unpalatable, or even unbearable: at this point, they can travel a number of well-trodden paths, ones that allow them to label themselves feminist while not knowing, or ceasing really to know, those aspects of feminism that are most discomfiting and demanding. They thus can avail themselves of a key privilege of the powerful, notwithstanding their affirmation of feminist analyses: that of obliviousness to the practical and ethical implications of their own power. In order to recognize the distinctive obstacles to certain kinds of male feminist knowledge, it will be useful to consider, at least ideal-typically, ways in which women come to feminist knowledge and integrate it into their lives.

Women and feminist knowledge Life within patriarchy gives women a vivid knowledge of patriarchal harms - of sexual abuse, violence, discrimination, condescension, and so on. Absent a feminist analysis, however, these experiences can seem anomalous, inarticulable, or merely private. By describing these phenomena in terms of patterns of male domination, feminist analyses can meet with a shock of recognition: they offer women a coherent story about intense, if previously inchoate, dissatisfactions and sources of pain. Feminism thus generalizes from women's experiences under patriarchy, offering them new ways to understand their own lives, conceptualize possibilities for change, and act in the world. This transformation of consciousness is always incomplete and so, in Sandra Bartky's words, "feminist consciousness, in large measure, is an anguished consciousness."

[7] Feminist women recognize patriarchal elements in their self-understandings even as they see that these understandings are inadequate to their material experiences. [8] Bartky offers the example of timid behavior in a departmental meeting: is it a personal idiosyncrasy? Or a typically female trait, a shared inability to display aggression, even verbal aggression?.... Uncertainties such as these make it difficult to decide how to struggle and whom to struggle against, but the very possibility of understanding one's own motivations, character traits, and impulses is also at stake.... Whether she lives a fairly conventional life or an unconventional one, ordinary social life presents to the feminist an unending sequence of such occasions and each occasion is a test. It is not easy to live under the strain of constant testing.... [9] Yet women have strong incentives for holding onto feminist knowledge and negotiating its demands, however haltingly, for the patterns brought into view by feminist analyses work to subvert, manipulate, exploit, and harm women. Letting such harms to self and others slide from view makes them no less harmful; indeed, not-knowing these things requires forms of dissociation that are themselves destructive of women's selves and relationships. [1] Feminism not only describes harms but indicates avenues of resistance and visions of social change; these provide motivations for ongoing engagement and struggle. The trajectories that follow are diverse and complex, but even this simple sketch of how women come to feminist knowledge and find ways of negotiating it as a part of everyday life is enough to set up a contrast with male feminist knowledge.

Male feminist knowledge We now can turn to the central questions of this essay: How deeply are men likely to know feminism, and what kinds of transformation of consciousness and action are likely to attach to their knowledge? Let me discuss this question in terms of possibilities for men in general before moving on to the particular case of feminist men in the academy. On the very possibility of male feminist knowledge Sandra Harding's work is useful in getting a grip on the possibility of men gaining feminist knowledge. [11] Harding's work emphasizes the social situatedness of all knowledges, and argues that once we appreciate the standpoint specificity of knowledge, we see that

marginalized and oppressed groups often have a more objective grasp of social relations than the privileged. As Harding writes, The logic of the standpoint epistemologies depends on the understanding that the 'master's position' in any set of dominating social relations tends to produce distorted visions of the real regularities and underlying causal tendencies in social relations.... The feminist standpoint epistemologies argue that because men are in the master's position vis-a-vis women, women's social experience - conceptualized through the lens of feminist theory - can provide the grounds for a less distorted understanding of the world around us. [12] The distortion of male perspectives on social relations results from men's failure, as a dominant group, critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the power relations that perpetuate it. There are a number of reasons why women might be better positioned than men to come to understand gendered power relations. First, women do not have the same interest as men in ignorance, but rather have much to gain from understanding and resisting operations of gendered power. Second, women's material existences expose them to aspects of life that men use their power to avoid and ignore: housework, child-rearing, and affective labour, for example. Women therefore are better positioned to appreciate the variety of roles and activities that figure in patriarchal arrangements. Third, women have strong incentives to try to understand the world through men's eyes as well; as María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman write, oppressed groups learn the perspective of the powerful "through the sharp observation stark exigency demands." [13] Fourth, struggling against social arrangements reveals something of their structure: one discovers where they resist, and how they fight back. Feminist activism therefore brings its own epistemological gains. For all of these reasons, the standpoints of women provide key starting points for understanding patriarchy (which is not to say that women spontaneously develop such understandings). As an oppressed group, women are in a position to see gaps between their experiences and interests on the one hand, and how their lives are conceptualized and organized by dominant ideologies on the other. Harding sees standpoint epistemology, though, as a route to strongly objective knowledge: by combining the perspectives of different social groups, we assemble a body of knowledge more trustworthy than that available from any single perspective, and this body of knowledge, once assembled, can itself be understood by those with various standpoints. This suggests that men can gain feminist knowledge: they can understand structures of gendered power by taking on board the aggregated perspectives of those oppressed by these structures, and by using the perspectives of women's lives to reinterpret their own. Now I agree with Harding that men can draw upon feminist insights to reinterpret their lives and the structures of power undergirding their privilege. Indeed, only through this kind of reinterpretation can men integrate knowledge of patriarchal privileges and harms into a minimally decent social and political engagement. Harding's argument staves off an essentialist pessimism that would treat men as patriarchal drones, and gendered standpoints as hermetically sealed. Yet I find myself more pessimistic than Harding about the likelihood of male feminist knowledge, for at least two reasons. The first concerns the very possibility of men knowing feminism - of our understanding the perspectives of women and generating knowledge on this basis. For it's not clear that empathetic listening can give men an adequate grasp of some of the experiences most central to feminist analyses - the ever-present possibility of sexual assault, for example, or pervasive objectification and sexual harassment, or condescension based on gender. This is not to excuse men from the responsibility of trying to understand, but it is to mistrust any sense they may develop of actually having understood. A case in point: more than one straight male friend has declared, after unwelcome cruising by another man, that he now understands just what women go through. This seems a paradigm of not getting it. To assimilate men's and women's experiences of unsolicited male sexual attention is to ignore the power structures and cultural presumptions that surround these acts. A man being cruised likely experiences this as anomalous, not as a reminder of the pervasiveness of his objectification and of sexualized threats. He has the support of cultural stereotypes wherein gay men prey on straights, and likely can avail himself of the anti-gay revulsion if not violence of many other straight men. So while such men's empathy with sexually harassed women is valuable and may provide an opening to consciousness raising around sexism (not to mention homophobia), his empathy ought not to erase the gulf between experiences typical of men and women, nor the ways in which men's power both isolates them from certain gendered experiences and tempts them to believe that they fully understand. [14] A second reason I find myself more pessimistic than Harding on the prospects for male feminist knowledge concerns not its possibility but its likelihood. Here we return to the question of how men's concrete situations and experiences inflect and influence their coming to feminist knowledge, and their acting on the basis of this knowledge. I want to consider, in particular, incentives and disincentives that may shape men's movement from shallow to deeper knowledge of feminism. We can begin by assessing what deep feminist knowledge would tell a man about himself. An ideal of male feminist knowledge. In coming to recognize the operations of patriarchy, a man would learn some troubling things not only about his society, but

about his own life. He would learn that he has internalized patriarchal affects, habits, and desires, in more ways than can be traced or changed; that he has benefited and continues to benefit from male privilege (though this will be differently inflected depending on his situation with respect to other axes of oppression and identity); that he has oppressed and continues to be complicit in the oppression of women in general and of particular women in his own life; that his every gaze and sentence and interaction is inflected, in large or small ways, by sexism and patriarchal privilege. Feminist analyses show women how experiences of pain and harm are in fact patterned effects of oppression. For men, however, many of the corollaries of women's oppression have likely been experienced as positive and deserved, since from the standpoint of the powerful and absent a structured critical analysis, the status quo tends to appear natural and just. Absent a feminist analysis, a man easily can regard his accomplishments as proportionate to his abilities; his relationships as emotionally rich; his sexual experiences with women as mutually consensual and pleasurable; and the space allowed him in conversations as commensurate with his knowledge and wit. A feminist analysis retells these stories in unflattering ways, showing a man harms in which he has participated and will continue to participate. For men cannot purge themselves of the power and inclinations that cause and abet patriarchal harms. A man can reshape himself and his actions - he can make political choices informed by feminist commitments, take women's perspectives seriously, alter his desires and propensities (within limits), and change how he acts on these. But it is important to take seriously the depth of male socialization - the micro-behaviors, desires, and beliefs that are constructed and reinforced by patriarchy. [15] Many pro-feminist men will be aware of this anguished consciousness of the progressive yet privileged: there is a surplus of areas for reflection and change, and in each of these areas it is hard to grant oneself the luxury of just taking it easy. One example, instructive in its relative triviality, is that of exchanges of looks in the street. I cope with the alienation of life in a largish city by being vaguely friendly with strangers; one way to express this is by meeting a passerby's eyes and smiling. Yet it makes sense for women to feel less than thrilled when beamed at by a strange man; it leaves them to judge whether the attention is benign or a prelude to harassment. So there's a micro-politics around this casual practice: I exercise male privilege, and probably leave some women feeling harassed or put out, by my ostensibly friendly smile. And there's a meta-politics around deciding how much thought or effort to devote to this issue, sitting as it does alongside a wealth of others. The shock awaiting a man with thorough knowledge of feminism would be acute: he'd lose his sense of secure grounding in the world - his faith in his own judgments, emotions, and desires. Every aspect of his self would become suspect, and also potentially impositional or harmful. Did he just make a sexist comment? Should he hold this door? Was that a pornographic gaze? There is a further sense in which men are unable to purge themselves of their roles in patriarchal harms. It is not only socialization that is relatively immovable in any given man's case, but also the structures of power that endow him with privilege. Privilege can be given up in particular contexts - bowing out of competitions in areas where women have been especially disadvantaged, for example, or letting a woman decide in a context where masculinity gives one the power to prevail. But men will be treated as men, in an inexhaustible array of contexts. However much men work on themselves, they remain relatively safe from sexual assault, relatively credible in conversations, and so forth. It is for this reason that discussions of male feminism have to deal not only with the extent of men's commitment to giving up privilege, but the ways in which male privilege surpasses the agency of individuals, structuring the situation of every man, no matter how good-willed. Because male privilege derives from female subordination, feminist men face a painful uncertainty about how to deal with the surplus of instances of this privilege in their own lives. Probable forms of male feminist knowledge If these kinds of anguished consciousness are part of a man's knowing feminism, what is the likelihood of men actually achieving and living this demanding knowledge? What incentives lie along men's paths to such feminist knowledge, and how do these affect men's propensities to stop in particular places, or carry on in particular ways? In looking at probable forms of male feminist knowledge, I will describe four 'types': the poseur, the insider, the humanist, and the self-flagellator. These are ideal types, tendencies that rarely are so clear or unmixed in particular lives. Ideal types provide objects of comparison, tools for sorting through the complexities of individual cases and showing politically important commonalities between cases. Most male feminists will in fact exhibit qualities and moments from each of the types, alongside more creditable understandings and behaviors. Shifting from issues of possibility to probability requires that we be more specific about context and constituency; in what follows I refer most directly to the feminist engagement of that mainly white, mainly middle class, mainly straight constituency of men involved in higher education. I leave open the question of how the probability of transformative feminist engagement differs for other groups of men. Note that my focus is not on academic men in general, but on those men in the academy who profess an interest in feminism; I want to consider whether and how this engagement might become transformative. One can distinguish this issue from



the important question of how best to spur a sympathetic interest in feminism among that majority of academic men who are indifferent or hostile. So let's look at rewards and punishments that come into play given various levels of feminist engagement on the part of academic men. A first set of rewards and punishments attaches to men being perceived as feminist within the academy. At this historical moment, feminist research comprises some of the most interesting, creative, and influential work in the humanities. In at least some institutions, there is cachet and benefit to men who profess interest and competence in feminism as theory. One's non-feminist research, teaching opportunities, popularity with students, and CV all can be enriched by a pinch of feminist spice.[16] These rewards are not available in the same way for women in the academy, who are at disproportionate risk of being pigeon-holed as feminists, treated as marginal, seen as doing work that is unphilosophical or not genuinely in their discipline, and so on. Feminist academic women are well-justified in their resentment of this gendered dynamic. [17] How do these rewards vary with the actual depth of a man's feminist engagement? My suspicion is that the most tangible practical rewards tend to be allotted by men and women with limited understandings of, or sympathy with, feminism; as such, it may not matter whether a man is serious in his feminism, so long as he can go through certain motions. Indeed, a shallow engagement with feminism gives one scope to tailor one's apparent commitment in relation to circumstances. One can be radical in the approving atmosphere of a feminist conference, yet safe within one's more conservative department. The rewards and punishments for being perceived as feminist tend also to line up with a theory/practice divide. Men may have a lot to gain (and not much to lose) by dabbling in feminist theory, but have little practically to gain from feminist practice, especially when this practice directly challenges patriarchal structures and behaviors. There are immediate costs to confronting the sexism of friends, colleagues, and superiors, staking one's authority on unpopular feminist principles and proposals, or giving up material entitlements that reflect one's privilege. This is to say that the practical rewards that accompany being perceived as feminist seem to support a shallow engagement with feminism, but do not in themselves provide a very compelling counterweight to the costs involved in deeper feminist knowledge or more concerted feminist engagement. This gives us one male feminist type: the 'poseur'. The poseur is interested in feminist theory, and tends to have a lot to say about it (though he's often read the theory pretty instrumentally, as it serves his non-feminist projects). The poseur is unlikely to have turned feminist critiques upon his own theoretical and practical tendencies - to have extended his feminist analysis from a concern with structures to a consideration of how these structures have informed his own identity, in ways that correlate with patriarchal harms. The poseur is comfortable in his gendered skin, and doesn't experience his putatively feminist commitments as particularly demanding, or painful. Yet few men's interest in feminism is motivated by external incentives alone; there often is a desire to restore a sense of one's own worth or virtue given a recognition of one's implication in patriarchy. The stance of the poseur is unlikely to meet this need, which draws men to feminist articulations of how patriarchy shapes identities and correlates with gendered harms. There is an inevitable paradox, however, in a man's turning to feminism to feel better about himself, since feminist analyses don't tend to cast men in a particularly flattering light. If a man's engagement is sufficiently shallow, though, he may be able to experience his feminism as a relatively painless sign of virtue: this gives us a second male feminist type, the 'insider'. The insider feels an ethical or political commitment to feminism, and believes that he's doing well at it. He is involved in the right kind of volunteer work, vocal in his support of feminist projects and his revulsion at patriarchal harms, reads the right books, or is feminist from the lectern. Where the poseur has limited interest in feminist activities or in what female feminists actually make of him, the insider premises his comfortable self-image on doing well in the eyes of feminist women, even while his comfort militates against his addressing his own sexist tendencies. The self-perception of insiders doesn't, however, tend to collapse under the weight of this contradiction between self-image and behavior, for a number of reasons. First, the insider is not likely to be sensitive to cues concerning his gendered behavior; like many non-feminist men, he can remain happily oblivious to the fact that he's boring people, or causing discomfort, or wasting an organization's time. He hasn't learned how gendered privilege encourages such blindness. Second, the insider possesses power over those feminists with whom he interacts - gendered power at least, and often the additional power of academic hierarchy (of a professor with his students, or a tenured man with untenured women). This power increases the likelihood that an insider will be humored or tolerated. Third, the insider's participation in feminist activities may in some ways be useful, notwithstanding the relative shallowness of his own feminist analysis; this is the more likely if he has power within an institutional hierarchy, and if feminists with whom he is involved are under-resourced or relatively powerless. Fourth, women often can't be bothered to challenge men on their every act of sexism - who has that kind of time? And who wants to have to deal with men's reactions to such challenges, be they angry, defensive, or contrite? Fifth, there are strong psychological incentives for women (and men) to interpret male feminism

charitably, be it that of male partners, friends, or colleagues. We want to be able to love and respect those close to us, and to live in a world where change is possible; the oxymoronic quality of male feminism is disconcerting from this point of view, and so there is a temptation to give feminist men the benefit of the doubt. For all of these reasons, the comfortable perspective of an insider is remarkably resilient, and the ideal type finds reflections in the behaviors and attitudes of many putatively feminist men. Because insiders are prone to involvement in feminist projects, not particularly reflective about their own sexism and gendered propensities, and unsophisticated in their feminist analyses, they can be destructive influences on feminist endeavours, notwithstanding their good intentions. As Harding notes, "Men love appropriating, directing, judging, and managing everything they can get their hands on - especially the white, Western, heterosexual, and economically over-privileged men with whom most feminist scholars and researchers most often find themselves interacting...." [18] These disruptive consequences are exacerbated because in order to take feminist analyses seriously while continuing to feel good about himself, the insider has to locate the agents of patriarchy elsewhere. Sexism is projected onto other men, who then are figured as problems and targets for activism. This is, of course, a common trope, but represents a deep misunderstanding of patriarchy: in exempting the insider from self-criticism, it also leads to impoverished feminist analyses and strategies. Insiders take feminism seriously enough to recognize certain patriarchal harms, yet conceive of these harms so as to allow their feminism to be a source of pride without being much of a source of pain. This complacency removes the incentive for a deeper engagement with feminism. Yet there are men who come to feminism with questions and qualms about themselves that push them beyond such complacency. These men wish to address a painful sense of distortion or responsibility, given an awareness of patriarchal aspects of their own identities. I want to discuss two ways in which such men can shy away from the complex implications of feminist analyses for their own situations, before characterizing more successful paths of male feminist engagement. A first wrong turning awaits men who emphasize ways in which patriarchy has distorted their own sense of self - I'll call this 'humanism'. While the humanist sees that patriarchy has benefited him in certain ways, he also feels its constraints. Patriarchal socialization constructs men as competitive; it erects standards of masculinity that leave men feeling inadequate, particularly where class and race place certain masculine roles (such as that of provider) at the very horizon of possibility; it makes men less able to experience and express emotions, or to form intimate relationships with women and other men; it deprives men of the fulfillment of nurturing children; it leaves them exposed to the power and violence of other men. The humanist wants to address these ways in which patriarchy hurts men as well as women. [19] Humanist men differ from those in the mytho-poetic men's movement, refusing nostalgia for a time when men were men and women knew their place. Humanists want to become different kinds of men, more in touch with feminine qualities and less constrained by patriarchal social structures. A lot can be said about this variety of humanism, but the main point is that while it draws upon feminist analyses and is characterized by its own form of anguished consciousness, it is not particularly feminist, focusing as it does on the well-being of men. bell hooks puts the point succinctly: male pain "does not erase or lessen male responsibility for supporting and perpetuating their power under patriarchy to exploit and oppress women in a manner far more grievous than the psychological stress or emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sex role patterns." [2] Nor is it evident that transforming male gender roles to permit men a more nurturing and embodied way of life would itself improve the lot of women: these two agendas are not necessarily at odds, but the complementarities are complex and irregular. So while there may be room for strategic alliances between those interested in liberating men from masculinity and those interested in liberating women from patriarchal oppression, this needs to be established in particular cases. It is sufficient, for our purposes, to notice that humanism can give short shrift to the third domain of feminism - the ways in which patriarchy, as external structure and part of identity, benefits men and harms women. [21] There is another variety of qualm about the self, one that can draw men to a deeper engagement with feminism than typified by either the insider or the humanist. Some men turn to feminism to address a sense of responsibility for patriarchal harms, given their gendered privilege and socialization. This seems a promising route to a transformative male feminism, but before turning to its positive dimensions let me point to one more wrong turning, exemplified by a fourth feminist type: the 'self-flagellator'. Self-flagellators combine a relatively deep knowledge of feminism with an intolerance for ambiguity: their analyses tend to focus on their guilt in relation to patriarchal harms, and on the need relentlessly to struggle against their own sexist impulses and understandings. In the intensity of their self-scrutiny, self-flagellators have a lot right. The problem is that insofar as men focus on their guilt in being tools of patriarchy, they risk self-indulgence in both their theory and their activism. What's more, a preoccupation with one's own abasement sets up no viable alternatives - one strives for a point where one will have purged oneself of sexism, and thus finally have been adequate to the feminist challenge. [22] Because male feminism as self-flagellation is

not sustainable as an ethical or political identity, it tends to lead to retreat to the stances of humanist or insider, or from feminism altogether. Negotiating male feminist knowledge With the male feminist types enumerated above, we see a number of ways in which men's engagement with feminism can stop short of transformative knowledge. My description of the 'types' is not meant to be exhaustive, nor as an exercise in ridicule or castigation: few men express these types completely, and most of us who call ourselves anti-sexist, pro-feminist, or feminist embody aspects or moments of all four. The 'types' are meant as critical devices, aids to recognizing common pitfalls as these manifest themselves amidst the nuance and complexity of individual men's lives. Recognizing these pitfalls, we can explore ways of moving beyond them, to more creditable and sustainable forms of male feminist engagement. [23] A man with deep knowledge of feminism faces a sometimes unflattering re-telling of his life story; he has to reinterpret merit as privilege, and to recognize an inexhaustibility of patriarchal imprints in his habits and understandings. It's not clear how one acts responsibly on this kind of knowledge. Furthermore, in defining sustainable forms of male feminist knowledge, we have to recognize that bad faith is more difficult to resist when comfort and privilege are always on offer. This is particularly true insofar as many of the practical and emotional rewards for male feminism are there given a shallow engagement, whereas much of the internal conflict and external punishment is reserved for forms of consciousness and action premised on deeper knowledge. Men do find ways past the various wrong turnings enumerated above - ways to negotiate the mistrust and dislike of self that can be provoked by feminist knowledge, while also creating ethical and political practices that meet some of its demands and bring their own rewards. The key is to find ways to live responsibly with the contradictions described by male feminism and even to flourish in their presence, rather than trying to flee them, or giving in to those parts of ourselves that crave a greater simplicity or a less equivocal congratulation for our anti-sexist accomplishments. Necessary conditions for more sustainable forms of male feminism include (i) a willingness to conceive of oneself as ethically complex and incomplete; (ii) an openness to criticism and a propensity to self-criticism; and (iii) engagement in activist friendships and community. (i) Complex ethical implication in patriarchy One of the most difficult aspects of male feminist consciousness is awareness of the extent to which one's life story and identity are defined by patriarchal privilege. It is dizzying and deeply upsetting to recognize one's sense of entitlement as a power-laden fiction, given that the fiction structures so many of one's practices and understandings. Nor can one ever bring the whole of one's patriarchal tendencies into relief. For one thing, patriarchy structures identity in more ways than can be traced. And for another, the implications of our privilege in others' pain is not a truth that we can hold in view for long. For example, my experience in the classroom is deeply influenced by gender - by the privileges my gender has secured for me; by the complex play of entitlement and deference between men and women in the room; by the ways our gendered experiences have been shaped by sexual violence and its threat, by the production and consumption of pornography, and so on. Knowledge of these facts should inform my teaching, yet this need not mean - cannot mean - having this knowledge present, in its profusion and even horror, from moment to moment. Male feminists must find ways to negotiate an awareness of their privilege, while also struggling to change a world that sets up this privilege as part of interlocking inequalities and oppressions. Living with integrity as a feminist man requires both a sensitivity to the small and large harms one inflicts as a bearer of this gender, and a commitment to transforming this state of affairs in oneself and the world. Yet one simultaneously must accept that one will never act with a pure will, nor in ways that are entirely laudable. Ignoring such failings invites a slide into complacency, while fixating on them is a route to burnout or self-indulgent immobilization. A life of relative privilege is not particularly good preparation for brooking ambiguous pictures of oneself. Most of the men I know have pretty brittle personality structures, which have us feeling either fabulous or in danger of disappearing altogether. But a need for simplicity - in which one is either very good or very bad - lies behind the behavior of the insider and the self-flagellator. A sustainable yet transformative male feminism finds ways beyond this: decent and sustainable ways for men to cycle between forgiveness and anger, seriousness and irony toward self and other, self-scrutiny and self-acceptance. (ii) Criticism and self-criticism For male feminism to be sustainable as a self-transformative and politically engaged way of life, feminist men must find constructive ways to act skeptically toward themselves and each other. If the project of negotiating feminist knowledge is left for each man to work out for himself, the prospects seem pretty bleak. It thus is important for men to address each other's bad faith in connection with gendered privilege and feminist engagements, while supporting one another as feminists. [24] Feminist women should not be expected to play these critical or constructive roles, especially given the meager returns they have come to expect on such investments of time and energy. Feminist men have to find ways of acting that neither assume an inappropriate authority in defining feminist goals and strategies, nor seek ongoing reassurance, praise, discipline, or thanks from women. The need for feminist men to exercise skepticism toward themselves and each other defines a project



in itself: that of developing detailed descriptions of common male feminist pitfalls, and thresholds of decent behavior, in specific contexts. I've done that in a loose way here with respect to the academy. But there's room for more precise and pointed work along these lines; I wish, only half-facetiously, for a flyer headed "So You're a Male Feminist Professor?" followed by a checklist. Male academics might be invited to evaluate their feminist credentials, placing checks beside items like: \* I do not let sexist language or comments go unchallenged, whether they be from students or colleagues. \* I am attentive to gendered aspects of my conversational styles, and am careful to give women equal time. \* I have devoted serious effort to studying feminist work in my field, and integrate it into my courses in a non-tokenistic way. \* I know the anti-discrimination and sexual harassment policies of my university, do my best to see them honored in my department, and work to improve the policies themselves. \* I am reflective about my interactions with female students, and am careful about condescension, harassment, and providing adequate support. I mentor female students. \* I am aware of issues of women's safety on campus, and use my influence to support feminist initiatives. This checklist could of course be extended a very long way. My point is that men often need clear and specific reminders that a feminist analysis of male privilege brings with it demands that are not to be confronted only in one's spare time, or when the fancy strikes one. Such lists are no substitute for integrated feminist analyses and commitments, but are meant to remind men of these in the face of deeply entrenched habits, familiar comforts, and the lure of indifference. Specific reminders and challenges express not piousness, but recognition of the difficulty of sustaining understandings and behaviors that are at odds with deep features of one's self and one's surroundings. (iii) Engagement in activist friendships and communities To the extent that a man understands feminism in more than a shallow way, he faces epistemological uncertainty, ethical discomfort, emotional turmoil, and extensive political demands. It can be difficult to figure out where to start, how to proceed, or when to allow oneself to rest. One can't solve these dilemmas through mere reflection, and especially not through solitary reflection. Rather, it is through action that one finds ways to negotiate these dilemmas. How you act and how your actions affect those around you are more adequate indicators of your feminist commitment and consciousness than how you imagine yourself. What's more, men gain a clearer understanding of gendered power, in its complexity and intractability, by actively struggling against it. Action also provides a way of negotiating uncertainty - about whether you have the right analysis, how you can effect change, how much you need to do in a given context, and how to balance personal with political endeavours. As intellectuals, there is a temptation to work on developing the right analysis before we act. In the case of male feminism, this emphasis on prior understanding is immobilizing, and conveniently so: 'I'm doing nothing because I haven't figured out what a man legitimately may do'. Feminist knowledge should itself be a goad to action, and is enriched by activist experience. Action also brings one into community with others, who can provide resources important in negotiating a feminist commitment. This action can be within existing feminist organizations where these make space for men's participation and where men do the work required to curb some of their more disruptive tendencies. Perhaps more appropriately, men can support one another in the anti-sexist education of boys and men, and in campaigns directed at patriarchal aspects of institutions and practices, in the academy and elsewhere. And feminist activism also includes struggles closer to home, to transform relationships with colleagues, students, lovers, family, and friends. Feminist action takes place in relationship with others, and these relationships offer some of the richest rewards for male feminist engagement. Making feminist understandings operative in one's social and political life opens up possibilities of honest connection, community with others, and participation in valuable personal and social changes. Such rewards do not have to await the resolution of ambiguities within the self, and indeed offer compensations for the dislocations and struggles emphasized in this essay. So activist community offers an important way of living with, though never resolving, the tensions and paradoxes of male feminist consciousness.

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Male feminism is an identity rife with contradictions: it requires that one maintain an awareness of the extent to which one acts, feels, and theorizes with a power-laden gender; this means constantly reminding oneself, and being reminded, of specifics of one's patriarchal tendencies and their pernicious consequences for women, while also struggling to change these. As beneficiaries of oppression, men cannot escape the ethical imperative of facing this discomfort and this struggle. And to the extent that men adequately understand feminism, the struggle - in its difficult and rewarding moments - does not have an end. Decent men must try to act as feminists, but only in a profoundly transformed world will male feminism be something other than an oxymoron.

Endnotes 1. This essay has been helped along by discussions with Judith Asher, Sarah Begus,

Monique Deveaux, Tom Digby, Jeremy Goldman, Sandra Harding, Cressida Heyes, Sue James, Michael Kimmel, Linda Nicholson, Rebecca Pates, Henry Rubin, and James Tully. I am grateful to the Women's Studies Graduate Colloquium Series at Brandeis University and to Socialist Feminist Philosophers in Action for opportunities to present the work in progress. I wish to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University.

2. There is a considerable amount of work on tensions between male privilege and male feminism. See, for example, bell hooks, "Men: Comrades in Struggle," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984): 67-81; Renate D. Klein, "The 'Men-Problem' in Women's Studies: The Expert, the Ignoramus and the Poor Dear," in *Radical Voices: A Decade of Feminist Resistance from Women's Studies International Forum*, Renate D. Klein and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, eds. (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989): 106-120; Linda R. Williams, "Men in Feminism," *Women: A Cultural Review* 1,1 (1990): 63-65; and the articles collected in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism* (New York: Methuen, 1988).

3. For a provocative discussion of disjunctures between genders and bodies, and ways in which masculinity and femininity vary independently as attributes of particular persons, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity," in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (eds.) *Constructing Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1995). The collection as a whole demonstrates some of the challenges as well as the limitations of postmodern skepticism about categories of gender.

4. Elizabeth Spelman's *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) is particularly useful on this point; see also Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

5. See Cressida Heyes, "Back to the Rough Ground: Wittgenstein, Essentialism, and Feminist Methodologies," in *Rereading the Canon: Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein*, Naomi Scheman, ed. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming 1997).

6. The situation of out gay men, for example, differs importantly when it comes to patriarchal harms and benefits: they are subject to harassment, rape, and violence from straight men; are discriminated against and oppressed in many domains; and do not avail themselves of the same patriarchal advantages as other men. So the analysis that follows would be differently inflected given a focus on gay masculinities and the material situation of gay men under patriarchy. Yet other forms of harm and privilege do not vary so sharply between out gay men and straight men (and the variations are even less pronounced for closeted gay men): there are importantly shared features of socialization, types of material privilege in relation to women, and forms of denial concerning patriarchal privileges and harms.

7. Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 14.

8. A further component of this anguished consciousness, though one left aside in this essay, relates to ways in which awareness of gendered structures of domination gives rise, at least potentially, to a recognition of other forms of domination, along lines of race, class, language, sexual orientation, disability, and so on. Most women find themselves on the privileged side of certain of these lines, and the pain of recognizing this fact is different than that of seeing oneself as a member of an oppressed group. Which points to an analogy between my discussion of male feminism as oxymoron, and the oxymoronic quality of these other privileged subject positions. See Bartky, 16.

9. Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 18-19.

10. Carol Gilligan's work is powerful on this latter point; see, for example, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

11. See Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); and her contribution to this volume.

12. Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 191.

13. María C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'The Woman's Voice'," in *Hypatia Reborn: Essays in Feminist Philosophy*, Azizah Y. Al-Hibri and Margaret A. Simons, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 21.

14. On the relevance of structures of power to the possibility of understanding between groups see Iris Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 3,3 (January 1997).

15. The internalization of patriarchal dispositions and understandings does not in itself differentiate men from women - it is this very quality that defines feminist women's 'anguished consciousness'. An important difference, though, is that a feminist woman who notices an echo of patriarchy in her behavior - say, a moment of feminine deference - has the shock of abetting her own disadvantage or oppression. A pro-feminist man who sees sexist echoes in his behavior - acting dismissively toward a woman in conversation, for example - finds himself harming another. Which is to suggest that while both men and women carry an inexhaustible store of habits and understandings formed by patriarchy, the manifestation of these patriarchal imprints makes different ethical demands on men and women.

16. The situation is different for men whose research and

teaching priorities center on a feminist agenda: this more concerted variety of male feminist engagement may meet with suspicion from colleagues and feminist women, doubts about one's intellectual seriousness, and backlash from conservative students. These costs surely vary with the consistency and seriousness of a man's commitment to feminism, as well as from institution to institution, and perhaps among generations of male scholars. 17. See Rosi Braidotti, "Envy; or, with Your Brains and My Looks," in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and the articles collected in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, eds., *Men in Feminism*. 18. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 280. 19. For a valuable and politically perceptive review of theoretical work on masculinity - much of which falls (deliberately or unwittingly) into the humanist mold - see Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14,5 (1985): 551-605. 20. bell hooks, "Men: Comrades in Struggle," 73. 21. Note that I am addressing humanism as an ideal type - an approach that uses feminist analyses only insofar as these show how patriarchy constrains and harms men. I wish simply to make the point that many of these harms can be mitigated in ways consistent with the continued oppression and exploitation of women - that there are non-feminist ways for men to express their emotions, nurture children, get closer to other men, and so forth. Moreover, my questions about the feminist implications of 'humanism' reflect this essay's focus on the question of academic men's propensities to move from an initial engagement with feminism to a more transformative knowledge. We can distinguish this from the issue of how men might be brought to engage with feminism in the first place. Humanism may in fact have considerable value as a strategy for getting men interested in feminist analyses of masculinity; Michael Kimmel, for example, seeks to motivate men to be pro-feminist by drawing attention to how feminist reforms would improve their own lives and relationships. I'm pointing to the need (acknowledged by Kimmel) for strategies capable of moving men on from humanism to less comfortable and less male-centered analyses - that is, to pro-feminism (Kimmel's preferred term) or feminism. For an approach to male pro-feminist activism that focuses both on men's power and men's pain, see Michael Kaufman, "Men, Feminism, and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," in Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, eds. *Theorizing Masculinity*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994). For a sociological examination of factors that motivate men to engage with feminism and develop an anti-sexist commitment, see Harry Christian, *The Making of Anti-Sexist Men* (London: Routledge, 1994): his findings center on the influence of childhood experiences that depart from conventional gender expectations, and of close relationships with feminist women. 22. I find strong elements of male feminist self-flagellation in John Stoltenberg's work, and in pro-feminist men who take their inspiration from him. See Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man* (Portland, Oregon: Breitenbush Books, 1989). 23. I also want explicitly to recognize the value of men's anti-sexism even when it exhibits the pitfalls enumerated above: while these wrong turnings can have pernicious effects, they do not necessarily negate positive contributions, and certainly don't erase the good will of the men involved. The alignment between adequate understanding, admirable character, and good actions in the world is far from seamless. My emphasis on the need for self-scrutiny and on incentives to shallow feminist knowledge is meant not as a call for perfection, but as a strong reminder of concrete difficulties involved in responsibly negotiating a political commitment as fraught as that of male feminism. 24. This defines an important role for the sorts of anti-sexist men's groups that have provided the focus of much writing on male anti-sexism and pro-feminism. See, for example, Michael Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence" in Kaufman, ed. *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987).

