

Becoming and Being: The Experiences of Young Feminist Men in Iceland

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Department of Gender Studies

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Abstracts

Abstract in English

In the broader scholarship developed within masculinity studies, and working in particular with the conceptual frameworks of hegemonic masculinities and hybrid masculinities, this research sets out to provide an insight into the experiences of young feminist men in Iceland. In addition, I reach to the body of knowledge emerging in development studies aimed at increasing men's participation in gender and development projects. Tailoring the methodology to the Icelandic context and the examination of multiple and intersecting perspectives of masculinity as a complex category, I take on a qualitative and ethnographic approach, conducting interviews with 22 informants (15 feminist men and 7 gender equality experts). The types of sources I have used include informants' testimonies and a participant observation. Research questions focus on various changes in individual behaviors and attitudes, and social and paradigm shifts that arguably alter the landscape of dominant masculinities in Iceland and provide new strategies for social change.

Key words: hegemonic masculinities, hybrid masculinities, feminist men, gender and development, Iceland, changing masculinities, social change.

Abstract in Spanish

En el amplio campo de conocimientos en los estudios de masculinidad, y trabajando en particular con marcos conceptuales de masculinidades hegemónicas e híbridas, esta investigación propone una perspectiva de las experiencias de los jóvenes feministas en Islandia. Asimismo, hago una aproximación al conjunto de conocimientos en los Estudios de Desarrollo enfocados en aumentar la participación de los hombres en proyectos de género y desarrollo. Una metodología hecha a la medida para el contexto Islandés y para examinar las múltiples perspectivas de masculinidad que intersectan como una categoría compleja. Mi aproximación es cualitativa y etnográfica, entrevistando 22 informantes (15 feministas y 7 especialistas en equidad de género). Las fuentes que he utilizado incluyen los testimonios de los informantes y una observación participante. Las preguntas de investigación se enfocan en diversos retos en comportamientos y actitudes individuales y cambios sociales y de paradigma que presumiblemente alteran el panorama de las masculinidades dominantes en Islandia y proveen nuevas estrategias para el cambio social.

Palabras clave: masculinidades hegemónicas, masculinidades híbridas, hombres feministas, género y desarrollo, Islandia, masculinidades en cambio, cambio social.

Dedication

To Milica, my love.

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There are many people who have made this study and the completion of the thesis possible.

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I. Introduction

Since the 1970's Iceland has seen a vast improvement in the equality between women and men, enabled through a number of legal, political and social changes. Central to this has been a very active women's and feminist movement. In recent years many feminists and governmental institutions have identified the participation of men as crucial to increasing equality between women and men. In the last ten years I have been involved in gender equality issues and feminist public actions in Iceland, focusing on the engagement of men. In recent years there has been an increase in young men who want to challenge dominant and resilient ideas of masculinities, and therefore engage in gender equality and feminist issues, I have through this experience wanted to gain a deeper understanding of what this engagement means and entails.

This research will attempt to address what the engagement of men means and entails, through talking with young feminist men, aged 18-26. The main research question is the following: How does assuming feminist identity shape one's concept of masculinity? In addition I will be addressing a few sub-questions including: What can the experiences of Icelandic pro-feminist men tell us about how they conceptualize their own masculinities and define their feminist identity? What kinds of everyday challenges do they face positioned this way? How can experiences be conceptualized in such a way as to challenge the paradigm of dominant masculinities? How can the lessons learned be articulated in order to inform conceptual frameworks of social change? Further questions have emerged during the study and through the analysis. They will be discussed below.

In order to create a frame around the analysis of this study I have structured the thesis in the following way. In chapter two, titled "The Case of Iceland", I provide an

overview of gender equality issues, including the women's rights movements of the 20th century and more feminist movements in Iceland. I draw forward the developments and themes that are relevant to this study in order to provide a background to the current situation this study is attempting to capture. I try to focus especially on the issue of men's involvement.

The third chapter brings together the theoretical literature that is relevant to this study. This includes: research and theory on men and masculinities; the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the notion of changing masculinities; the relevance of researching the experiences of feminist men; recent global and transnational trends that have emerged in international developmental work focused on men and masculinities; the importance of work related to combating violence against women; how to politicize men; and finally the challenges entailed in engaging men in feminism and gender equality issues.

In the fourth chapter I describe the research design and the methodology applied for this study, in addition to addressing some challenges and my own standpoint as researcher towards this topic and study. In the fifth chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study. The chapter includes a summary of the themes that came out through the analysis of the interviews I conducted. In addition I will bring themes from both the Icelandic context chapter and especially the theoretical chapter, in order to discuss and engage with the themes that emerged from the stories my respondents shared. The themes that appeared through the analysis include: the new developments in feminism in Iceland; the popularity of feminism amongst young people; the materialization of a space for men and feminism; how these men were inspired to get involved in feminism; the centrality of combating violence against women; how they experience interacting with dominant male culture; how to inspire or create a space for more

egalitarian masculinities; how these men experience being feminist; what challenges and limitations are encountered when men get involved in feminism; how to prompt change amongst men and influence social change with improved gender relations; how to achieve change through education; and lastly to discuss the optimism that seems to prevail among these men regarding creating more progressive masculinities.

In the final, conclusion, chapter I will provide a final discussion about the findings, situating the themes theoretically and contemplate the lessons to be learned from this study.

II. The Case of Iceland

Introduction

In this subchapter I will provide a look at the main themes and contributions of men through the history of women's movements in Iceland. In addition to providing an overview of men's contribution, support and engagement with women's movements, I will look at the historical context of Iceland and the current situation regarding gender equality. In addition to contribute to the themes of the thesis as a whole, the objective is to provide a brief analysis of how the engagement of men has developed and what changes that has entailed. The main questions I will be looking at is: How has the role of men in feminist issues in Iceland developed since the women's liberation movement of the 1970's and the third wave feminism of the early 2000's? What enabled a more engaged involvement of men in the Feminist Association of Iceland (founded in 2003)?

Iceland: A Nation of Strong Women and Equality?

As with any nation or community, there are many images and even myths about Iceland and the Icelandic nation. A common notion is that Iceland is a proud and independent nation that has its own distinct history, language and culture, proudly exhibited in the literature of the Icelandic Sagas, and a unique relationship with the raw nature of this island in the middle of the north Atlantic. In line with this, the view of Iceland as a class-less equalitarian society has been a big part of the portrayal and image of Iceland, both maintained in public discourse in Iceland but also presented internationally: "the Icelanders place a great emphasis on equality in all its dimensions: equality of status, equality of the sexes, equality of opportunity and to a considerable extent equality of conditions" (Ólafsson, 2003, p. 2). An important

aspect of that has been the equality of women and men; many have claimed that through the centuries, women's position in Iceland has always been good and that Icelanders have always had "liberal attitudes towards women" (Björnsdóttir, 1996, p. 106). In addition, through Icelandic history there have been many examples of "strong and independent women" (Kristmundsdóttir, 1995, p. 80).

Iceland has therefore been portrayed historically as a nation of strong women and in more recent years as a model country for gender equality, through innovative policies and initiatives. However there is not full agreement on this view of history. The status of women through the centuries (from settlement in the 9th century) as more equal and liberal, has in fact been challenged by some historians that have stated that despite "some strong female characters in the Icelandic sagas, Icelandic women did not enjoy better legal or social standing than women in other European countries" (Björnsdóttir, 1996, p. 107). It can be said that the notion of Icelandic women as being strong and independent has served a more symbolic purpose in constructing the image of Iceland.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Iceland

During the 19th century, especially the second half, Icelandic society went through many social, political and economic changes. This period saw the struggle for improved women's human rights emerge and many improvements for women's rights were enacted. The struggle for women's right to vote was one of the main issues of the women's movement in the first part of the 20th century and by 1920 all women gained the right to vote and run in national and municipality elections (Centre for Gender Equality, 2012). Despite various improvements and legislative attempts, progress in the beginning of the second half of the century was seen as slow.

The 1970's saw an increase in activity and advocacy and instrumental in increasing the profile of women's rights issues was the *Red Stockings Movement* (Icelandic: *Rauðsokkahreyfingin*). It was founded in 1970 as a women's liberation movement and was inspired by women's rights and feminist movements from all over the world, e.g. Denmark and the Netherlands. The UN International Women's year, 1975, turned out to be a crucial year for the women's movement in Iceland, with many important developments taking place. Most importantly, on October 24, 1975, a women's strike took place with more than 25 thousand women all over Iceland took a day off to highlight women's contribution to the economy, both through paid and unpaid work.¹ Even though the 1970's saw important changes and developments, there was considerable disappointment with the actual achievements.

However, in 1980, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir became the fourth president of the Republic of Iceland and the first woman in the world democratically elected as Head of State. In 1983 the Women's Alliance (Icelandic: *Kvennalisti*) was founded, running for parliamentary elections. The Alliance's main aim was women's liberation and increased representation of women in politics. As a result of their campaign, the percentage of female parliamentarians went from 5% to 15%. The 1990's saw some important legal changes and in addition services for victims of partner violence and rape were established and strengthened by women's organizations (The Centre for Gender Equality, 2012). The most important legislative innovation enacted in Iceland, after many years of advocacy from the women's movement and other stakeholders, in the beginning of the new millennium was the new law on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave (No. 95/2000). The system that the law enabled provides parents 9

¹ In 1975, the population of Iceland was 218,000. Source: Statistics Iceland: <http://www.statice.is/>

months paid parental leave: three months for fathers (non-transferable), three for mothers (non-transferable) and also three months to share (Gíslason, 2007).

The first decade of the 21st century continued to see some improvements on gender equality issues, but in the first few years of the decade and despite important legislation like the new maternity/paternity law, there was an increasing call for a new movement, especially in light of the Women's Alliance coming to a close in 1999 (Jónsdóttir, 2006). At the end of the century, and even a few years before the beginning of the new millennium, a growing demand for a new feminist movement was brewing (K. Einarisdóttir, 2003). The Feminist Association of Iceland was formally established on the 14th of March 2003 (Guðmundsdóttir, 2000), with around 500 members, including a number of men. Immediately the association got a lot of attention for its actions and activities (Þorgeirsdóttir, 2003). According to the associations manifesto it was created to be a platform for discussion and advocacy for Icelandic feminists. It was defined as a free and independent venue for mobilising critical feminist discussion on all spheres of Icelandic society.² It defined itself as part of the third wave of feminism and the association was created without any affiliations with particular political parties. What distinguished it from previous movements was that it encouraged the active participation of men as feminists and more distinctly a very important part of their internal and external practice was the use of the internet as a medium and a tool to enable a flat non-hierarchical grassroots structure (Jónsdóttir, 2006). In the ten years since its formation, the association has turned out to be a very important contributor and catalyst in highlighting and advocating for gender equality issues and improving the status of women (ibid).³

In recent years, Iceland has experienced increased attention for its successes on

² Feminist Association of Iceland/Femínistafélagið: <http://www.feministinn.is/>

³ Centre for Gender Equality

gender equality issues and has even been described as the ‘Best Country for Gender Equality’.⁴ Along with other Nordic countries, Iceland has in fact ranked high on various gender gap index lists, and in 2009 ranked number one on the World Economic Forum’s gender gap index, a rank that Iceland has kept since (i.e. 2010, 2011 and 2012)⁵. Following the economic crash in late 2008, Iceland went through a political shift in early 2009, Iceland got its first female and openly gay prime minister, first government cabinet with equal number of women and men, and various legislations being passed by parliament that addressed various gender equality related issues.

In the next subchapter I will look into the role of men in the women’s movement in Iceland.

The Involvement of Men in the Icelandic Women’s Movement

The contribution of men to the women’s movement in the late 19th and early 20th century in Iceland was not extensive, but when the *Red Stockings movement* was established in 1970, the involvement of men was encouraged. In the beginning it was seen as a movement of both women and men, stressing the strength of women and men working together to combat gender discrimination (Sigurður Magnússon, 1972, p. 10). In the first few years of the movement a number of men were active in working groups and activities. However despite being active in the beginning, their engagement did not last more than a few years and they were not noticeable in the movement’s activities, which ceased to exist in 1982 (Jónsdóttir, 2006). As with the

⁴ BBC October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11517459>

⁵ World Economic Forum: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2012>

Red Stockings movement, men were involved with the *Women's Alliance* (Jónsdóttir, 2006). However it seems they had a supportive role, which can partially be explained by the fact that one of the objectives of the Alliance's was to provide a platform for women to run for public office, in addition to of course raising the profile of women's rights issues. It has been pointed out that the success of the alliance in getting women elected shows that they also had wide support from men (Jónsdóttir, 2006).

Even though the participation and role of men was not very evident in the late seventies and early eighties, a gradual increase in focusing on men's involvement appeared during the 1990's and 2000's. For example, a women's rights magazine called *Vera*, first published 1982, started covering the issue of the role of men in Women's Liberation, 1987 onwards. However the issue did not gather proper momentum until 1991-1992, when the Minister of Social Affairs, established a "men's committee" (Icelandic: *Karlanefndin*), lasted two years, tasked with looking at the role of men in gender equality issues. The committee's function was to look at the position of men in a changed society and to identify ways to increase their family responsibilities (Gíslason, 2010). In line with the committee's proposals, the Gender Equality Councils Men's committee was set up in 1994 and functioned until 2000. Gíslason (2010) points out that the committee was active in public debates on the equality of women and men during the period it was active.

The committee focused on five main areas: men's violence against women; men's possibilities for paternity leave; father's rights towards their children after divorce; the status of boys in schools; and the attitudes of Icelandic men (ibid). The committee's priorities corresponded to similar trends both in Iceland and internationally.⁶ Gíslason (2010) points out that the establishment of a committee like

this was not unique to Iceland, in fact similar ones were set up in Norway and Denmark, in addition to a Nordic Men's Committee set up by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1995. Gíslason (2010) underscores that these committees reflected the position of official actors, that the gender equality agenda had stagnated and the same people were repeating the same message again and again. This led to some to conclude that there would not be much more progress while only women participated and contributed to the discussion. It was therefore considered necessary that men would be involved with the debate and that would only happen if men would talk together about these issues (Gíslason, 2010, p. 115-116). Even though the committees were well received, they were also quite disputed (*Vera*, 1992, 3:3). Einarsdóttir (1994) sheds light on some of the concerns raised, in her critique of the first men's committee's final report, published in 1993. She points out that the report starts on a very positive note, that suggests in many way a new way to look forward. But interestingly enough the report's second half becomes more negative and defensive, something that Einarsdóttir finds less conducive to smooth cooperation of women and men on these issues (p. 116-117).

In the mid 1990's the discussion started to be more diverse, as Gíslason (1996) remarks, in his overview of men's movements, that were internationally often categorized into three groups: anti-feminist, masculinist and pro-feminist. He notes that in the mid 1990's no such formal groups had been established in Iceland, but there were some possible signs that groups of men were establishing "masculinist" and also pro-feminist groups. In the late 1990's, new women's rights/feminist associations appeared, including *Kynjaverur* (English: Gendered Beings), (Þorgeirsdóttir, 1997), and *Bríet*, (an association of young women established in

1997), both stressing the importance of the involvement of men in feminism and gender equality issues (Þorgeirsdóttir, 2000).

In the late 1990's many of the same topics were being highlighted as ten years earlier (Guðmundsdóttir, 2000) but although the issues seemed to be the same, things had changed. As mentioned above, there was a new maternity/paternity law approved in 2000, and the new system started granting fathers parental leave in 2001. The law reached full implementation in 2003 and immediately the participation of fathers was more than initially hoped for (Gíslason, 2007). The new law was seen as an innovative step towards a more equal society for women and men, where men could enter a sphere where they had been missing for too long (Atlason, 2000). In addition it was emphasized that according to surveys done in the late 1990's, younger men in Iceland had attitudes more in harmony with women's attitudes than with older men. Some people believed that there was time and possibility to establish a gender equality movement where both women and men would work together (Óskarsdóttir et al, 2000). Various initiatives like the men's committee, paternity leave, the discussion on family friendly work environment, were by many seen as proof of the need to try to use new approaches and to involve men.

It was becoming evident that more and more people believed that in order to move forward on gender equality issues, men needed to be involved. One could say that one perspective on it was that women and men needed to join hands to work together in order to ensure equality between women and men, while another perspective was that men needed to get involved by getting together as men and discuss these issues amongst themselves, preferably alone. The argument being that they were likely to open up on the issue amongst other men and also for the reason that especially men in power positions would get attention. This is a perspective that

was highlighted when the men's committee was established in 1991 (Gíslason, 1991) and was repeated by former president Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (Vera, 2001, p. 38-43). This idea was put into action again when the Ministry of Social Affairs organized a conference in late 2005 called *Men on Board* (Icelandic: *Karlar um bord*), which was to be the first step in organizing an international conference, which never materialized (Gíslason, 2010).

The first perspective, mentioned above, one could say materialized when the Feminist Association of Iceland was established in 2003. Jónsdóttir (2006) has pointed out that men were from the start directly involved in the formation, actions and debates of the Feminist Association (p. 69). One of the working groups of the association had the objective of working on the issue of men and feminism. The working group on men and feminism, included both men and women, but for media actions the men in the group were usually in the forefront, the idea being to provide men with male feminist role models. Like the Association as a whole, the men's group (Icelandic: *Karlahópurinn*), as it became known as, organized many activities that focused on e.g. masculinities, fatherhood, role models, anti-feminism, prostitution, pornography and violence against women. From 2003 to 2010, the association and the men's group organized an annual campaign focused on engaging men in combating violence against women, called *Men Say No to Rape* (Icelandic: *Karlmenn segja NEI við Nauðgunum*).⁷

Interestingly, as Jónsdóttir notes, despite actions on behalf of the Association getting good media attention, the men's group seemed to get a lot more media coverage than the other groups (p. 68). Jónsdóttir points out that the media coverage, that men's group received had the positive effect of diminishing prejudices towards

⁷ Femínistafélagið, 2013.

men being active feminists and therefore making it more easily acceptable (Jonsdóttir, 2006). Atlason (2003), a male feminist and active member in the Association argued that the third wave of feminism, that the Association identifies with, makes it possible to go past essentializing about what women and men are, focusing on diversity.

In closing - Moving Forward?

The period from 2000-2010 and onwards, has seen important developments in gender equality issues, including the full rights for gays and lesbians enacted, a law banning the purchase of prostitution, a law prohibiting strip-dancing clubs, and a law that will obligate public corporations to have minimum 40/60 ratio of women and men in their boards. In 2009, for a few months there was an equal number of women and men cabinet ministers (Centre for Gender Equality, 2012). On October 24, 2005, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the women's strike or the women's day off, close to 50 thousand women rallied in Reykjavík, and in various towns around Iceland (Centre for Gender Equality, 2012). Gender equality issues continue to get attention, which has for some been crystallized in the fact that Iceland has been ranked at the top of the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index since 2009 (World Economic Forum, 2013). But what has this entailed? Has the improved legislative framework and increased public debate led to actual changes? And has all this led to Iceland becoming "The Most Feminist Place in the World"? (Johnson, 2011, p. 18).

In order to address the issue of what has changed and what is changing, recent years brought an increase in research on Icelandic Masculinities, including: research on fatherhood following the paternity law of 2001 (Arnalds et al, 2013); research on

the attitudes of young men (Hjálmsdóttir 2008); and a gender analysis of the Icelandic economic boom (2002-2007) and its subsequent economic crisis in 2008 (Einarsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2010; Johnson, Einarsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2013). The economic boom was symbolized by a homogenous group of bankers and investors, that portrayed a dominant masculinity that was drenched in nationalistic imagery citing the Vikings of Iceland's settlement period in the 9th and 10th century. In addition Jóhannsdóttir and Hjálmsdóttir (2011) have shed light on outspoken anti-feminist masculinities, in their analyses of a very popular media personality, arguing that his idea of masculinity depicts a harmful masculinity that undermines social and gender equality in contemporary Iceland.

In this chapter I have tried amongst other things, to cast light on how the role of men in feminist and gender equality issues in Iceland has evolved, focusing mostly on how it has changed since the women's liberation movement of the 1970' until the third wave feminism of the early 2000's. As was reflected with the involvement of men in the *Red Stockings movement* in Iceland and similar movements in other countries, men joining the women's movement as feminists or pro-feminists,⁸ was simpler said than done. Both the women's movement and men involved had important lessons to learn in order to fully understand how men can be involved in a movement that still first and foremost work towards improving women's rights. Two crucial issues that have been shown to move the issue forward are gender based violence and the involvement of men in care giving and child rearing. So when considering why the involvement of men in feminism was more easily acceptable by the time the Feminist Association was founded, many factors come into play, including the effects of the women's movement, important international declarations like the Beijing

⁸ In this study I usually refer to feminist, the use of pro-feminist, is for example not very common, even though some of my interviewees were aware of the term, and the reasoning behind it.

Platform⁹, new men's movements and a new generations of young women and men, that have different perspectives on how to address gender equality issues and how to apply feminism. No single factor played a role in making this something that people believed to be important and feasible. As evident with the involvement of men in the governmental men's groups in the 1990's, and more dramatically the men's rights movements in different countries, men's involvement could lead to more frictions. However, with a generation of women and men that had benefitted from previous women's movement, came a new platform for understanding and cooperation.¹⁰

⁹ Beijing Platform: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

¹⁰ In 2011 the Minister of Welfare established a new men's committee, and in 2013, it presented a report with proposals on issues and ways to move forward: http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/Rit_2013/karlar_og_jafnretti_skyrsla_m_tillogum_18ap2013.pdf

III. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the theoretical framework and developments in the study of men and masculinities, from various perspectives. I will focus on themes and topics that will provide a context to discuss the findings of this study.

Men as Allies

Ever since the birth of the women's rights movement men have been involved in the struggle for increased rights of women. In the 19th century and early 20th century in the U.S. for example, well known anti-slavery and civil rights advocates, became prominent supporters of women's rights, including women's rights to education and right to vote (Kimmel and Mosmiller, 1992). In the wake of the 1960's and 70's women's rights movement, men emerged again as allies, and some actively participated in what is usually referred to as the Second Wave. In addition with the emerging of women's and gender studies in the 1970's, the focus on men as gendered subjects increased, which led to the establishment of masculine and men's studies in the 1980's and 90's. (Kahn, 2009).

Shira Tarrant (2009) and Michael Messner (1997) point out that in the context of social movements in the U.S. and Europe in the 1960's and into the 1970's, like the civil rights, free speech, anti-war movements and the New Left, new radical politics emerged as powerful forces of social change. These movements were, however, not exempt from sexism and misogynist attitudes and as Tarrant points out, some men recognized their own chauvinistic behavior and joined the women's liberation movement as allies, usually identifying themselves as pro-feminists (Tarrant, 2009, p. 50). In the U.S. in the year 1975 for example, a new organization called NOMAS

(National Organization for Men Against Sexism) was established that had the clear objective of addressing social injustice through critically combating sexism in society and they saw a link between men's sex roles, gay rights and women's fight against sexism, pledging to combat all the social injustices these issues address (Tarrant, 2009, p. 52). The alliance of and support from men did not come without problems and some men were, despite their support for women's rights, not fully aware of their own social privilege (Tarrant, 2009, p. 53-54).

In the 1980's and 1990's, different and opposing perspectives on how to address the status of men in a changing world started to emerge, very often focusing on the issue of *men in crisis* or *crisis of masculinity*, looking at issues such as men and boys in education, men's violence against women, men's health, and fathers' rights (Kahn, 2009). A great diversity of men's movements and organizations started emerging, which included everything from feminist/pro-feminist organizations, to clear anti-feminist movements. This spectrum included the *mythopoetic* men's movement, men's rights or father's rights movement, who in many cases have confronted social change with a clear anti-feminist sentiment (Kimmel, 1995). More men started to respond to the separatist's tendencies of some women's movements by forming their own separatists groups, but not all of them anti-feminist. Some of these movements actually emerged from pro-feminist movements like NOMAS (Tarrant; Kahn; and Edwards). The most famous men's separatist movement, the mythopoetic men's movement emerged in the wake of Robert Bly's book *Iron John: A Book about men* (1990) and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (1992). They believed in liberating men from their suffering and reconnecting them with their masculine "essence" (Tarrant, 2009, p. 55). In addition to these movements, more overtly anti-feminists groups and movements started to emerge, that focused on men's rights and

fathers' rights. These groups criticized and attacked feminism for restricting and taking away the rights of men and fathers (Tarrant, 2009, p. 56-57).

As stated above, in the wake of the feminist movements of the 1960's and 1970's, masculinities have been changing in diverse ways. Since then the engagement of men on gender equality issues has emerged as an increasingly growing field within the field of gender equality policy work and development. This has not been a straightforward project and the concept of engaging men in building gender equality, as well as the approaches that have been used, have been disputed through various criticisms by and amongst feminist researchers and writers (Kahn, 2009; Edwards, 2006; Hooks, 2004). In the following section I will provide an overview of how the engagement of men has evolved, looking specifically how it has established itself in the field of policy and international development.

The Study of Masculinities

In line with many of the developments listed above and following the emergence of women's and gender studies in the 1970's the focus on studying men as gendered persons started to appear. Since then a diverse discipline has developed that has attempted to research and theorize on the history, reality and challenges of masculinity and in the last few decades a deeper understanding of masculinities has emerged (e.g. Connell, 2005b; Hearn, 2006; Kimmel, 2004; Edwards, 2006; Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). Various approaches and theoretical frameworks have been developed to address these vast complexities (Kahn, 2009).

This has all led to a deeper understanding of the nuances, contexts, perspectives and multiplicities of both prevailing and marginal masculinities. Not surprisingly,

dominating masculinities have been researched extensively and theorized about under various guises, including as, “traditional” masculinity (Helgeson, 1995), “dominant” masculinity (Courtenay, 2000b), “negative or extreme” masculinity (Helgeson, 1995) and “hegemonic” masculinity (Connell, 2005), to name a few. *Hegemonic masculinity* is, perhaps, the term that is most commonly applied in this context. Raewyn Connell is best known for establishing the theoretical framework around this concept (2005). In short “hegemonic masculinity” was conceived as a socially constructed notion of men and masculinities - depicting the hierarchical relations between various masculinities, and it provides a way to theoretically address how certain men in the hierarchy are able to make domination over most women and some men seem customary and essential (Connell 2005, Levy, 2007). Connell and Messerschmidt elaborate further:

Hegemonic masculinity was 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. (2005, p. 832).

Since it emerged in the early 1980’s the concept has been applied in diverse studies looking at a vast spectrum of topics (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). It has also been quite disputed and has gone through several critiques and revisions, including Collinson (1994), Hearn (1996, 2004), Gutmann (1996), Whitehead (2002), Halberstam (1998), Messerschmidt (2004) and Demetriou (2001). Demetriou for example argues that:

... 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 re- production of patriarchy (2001, p. 337).

In their article from 2005 Connell and Messerschmidt respond to critiques in the attempt to develop the concept, in light of the rich body of work that has emerged engaging with this topic and the study of masculinity in general. To this end, they present a more complex and nuanced version of the concept, suggesting a ...

... reformulation of the concept in four areas: a more complex model of gender hierarchy, emphasizing the agency of women; explicit recognition of the geography of masculinities, emphasizing the interplay among local, regional, and global levels; a more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power; and a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, recognizing internal contradictions and the possibilities of movement toward gender democracy. (2005, p. 829)

They point out that extensive research on the diversity of masculine experience and locations has underlined the importance of looking at how masculinities that are differently located, e.g. socially, politically, economically and globally, interact with each other. Looking at the agency of marginalized and subordinated masculinities has become important and is reflected in the understanding of masculinities, including how hegemonic masculinities interact with subordinate ones (Connell and Messerschmidt. 2005, p. 847).

As indicated, the theoretical perspectives used to research and theorize about masculinities have become more and more diverse. This has entailed amongst other things a more intersectional approach in looking at masculinities. Christensen and Jensen have recently suggested that:

... an intersectional approach may offer methodological and theoretical tools suited for analyzing the complexity of differences and inequalities between men as well as between men and women. (2014, p. 68).

As Crenshaw, Yuval-Davis and Fine (2009) have pointed out, it is crucial how different factors like race, gender, ethnicity or class interact, and look at the cumulative effects (p. 70). Kathy Davis has also pointed out that applying an intersectional feminist approach “encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure” (p. 79). And as Hearn (2011) has pointed out:

Crucially, intersectionalities are crucial not just in constructing masculinities but in the formation of the very category of men and relations to men’s practices. Gender(ed) power, dominance and hegemony with respect to the social category of men, are defined through and in relation to other social divisions. Social divisions operated as sources of both gender power or lack of power for men. Gender hegemony of men is maintained by intersectional relations, as well studied in terms of class, sexuality, ethnicity and racialization. Problematising hegemony entails attention to neglected intersectionalities (p. 93).

This role of intersectional categories in maintaining hegemonic masculinities is interesting when looking at hybrid masculinities. As Demetriou (2001) points out that when hegemonic masculinities are forced to adjust to societal changes, like increased critique of patriarchal social structures by women’s and gay rights movements, hegemonic social norms may adjust by absorbing characteristics or features of other subordinate masculinities, or for example how “... some elements of gay masculinities have become (through negotiation, appropriation, and translation) constitutive elements of modern hegemonic masculinity.” (p. 349). These adjustments generate *hybrid masculinities*, and as Anderson (2009) has pointed out, have become increasingly common. However, while Anderson sees this development as a sign that current masculinities are more egalitarian and inclusive, Messner (1993) has a different perspective. According to him, hybrid masculinities:

represent highly significant (but exaggerated) shifts in the cultural and personal styles . . . but these changes do not necessarily contribute to the undermining of conventional structures of men’s power. Although “softer” and more “sensitive” styles of masculinity are developing

among some privileged groups of men, this does not necessarily contribute to the emancipation of women; in fact, quite the contrary may be true. (p. 725)

Schippers underlines the importance of looking at “the queer practices of people who identify as heterosexual” (Schippers, 2000, p. 760) and Bridges (2014) states:

Hybrid masculinities illustrate the flexibility of contemporary masculinities (perhaps particularly young, white, straight masculinities), and straight men’s reliance on gay aesthetics is one kind of hybridization. These “gay straight” men might appear to blur the boundaries between gay and straight through assimilating a variety of gay aesthetics (p. 79).

Bridges (2014) goes on to point out that there are strong indications that such hybrid masculinities are “a significant social phenomenon.” (p. 80), arguing that some “... men’s reliance upon gay aesthetics expands “acceptable” performances of straight masculinity, but does so without challenging the systems of inequality from which they emerge.” (p. 80).

This follows Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) point that since gender relations continue to produce frictions and the women’s rights movement continues to challenge hegemonic masculinities, such masculinities find ways to maintain their hierarchical hold or “or reconstitute it in new conditions.” (p. 853). There is, of course, the possibility to conceptualize a hegemonic masculinity that would contribute to improving gender relations, a “positive” masculinity that would be “open to equality with women.” (p. 853). They point out that, this has in fact turned out to be a challenge to accomplish, but a “positive hegemony remains, nevertheless, a key strategy for contemporary efforts at reform.” (p. 853).

In the following section we will discuss one form of masculinity that has emerged in the last few decades, which is focused overtly at improving gender

relations between women and men and improving women's and gay rights, i.e. feminist or pro-feminist men.

Men and Feminism

One of the masculine identities, and the sphere of experience that has increasingly been put into focus, is the experience of feminist men (Kimmel, 1998; White, 2008; Kahn, 2009). Michael Kimmel points out that their perspective is important because men's reaction to feminism "contain[s] an angle of vision that needs to be addressed" if one is to understand how, why and to what effect men 'do' feminism" (Kimmel, 1998, p. 63). Increasingly more men are taking on more equality sensitive attitudes in their lives and a growing number of men all around the world are openly declaring themselves as feminists, pro-feminist, anti-sexist or advocates of gender equality. In light of this, more and more researchers are however looking into what it means to be a feminist man; because it has been pointed out how important it is to critically analyze the experience of feminist men (Kimmel, 1998; White, 2008; Kahn, 2009). This includes looking at the limitations; risks and also what are the individual experiences of this engagement of men in feminist or gender equality advocacy. However what this engagement means and entails can differ substantially, and is often not clearly defined, but more on that later in this chapter.

In her qualitative study of black feminist men in the U.S., Aaronette M. White (2008) argues that it is important to look at how men that become feminists, confront patriarchy, how they go through a number of personal, emotional and social challenges when they challenge culturally dominant ideals. This confrontation is a process, in fact "a feminist is not just someone you are automatically; it is a type of

person one must continuously become” (White, 2008, p. 201). In her study she identifies, amongst other things, the following three themes: stretching, blending and transforming (White, 2002). She, for example, explains: “They [profeminist black men] stretch themselves as they develop the skills and values necessary to listen to women and accept how women define their reality” (2002, p. 8). She points out the importance of being aware of the many complexities involved in being a pro-feminist man:

Most profeminist black men have to prove themselves to feminists and nonfeminists alike. That is, many people in our society are not used to the radical notions of manhood that profeminist men are choosing to explore, nor are they used to the radical notion that men, particularly black men, can be feminists. (White, 2002, p. 5).

Similarly Tarrant points out, that in negating masculine privilege, confronting sexism, supporting feminist causes, improving gender relations, contributing to the development of equitable communities and eradicating gender based injustice, these men can be overwhelmed with the task, the emotions, concerns, hostilities, in addition to feeling disenfranchised, uninvited and pigeonholed into stereotypes and feminist myths (Tarrant, 2009). As White (2002) pointed out above, there are many factors to bear in mind when looking into the experiences of feminist men and the engagement of men in gender issues. Feminist modes of manhood that challenge culturally dominant ideals and with listening and understanding them will not only give us insights into a changing manhood, but also insights into social change and justice (White, 2008). It is an alternative and oppositional way of being a man, that is an intersection of feminist and conventional view of gender roles and relations. It continues the feminist tradition of performing a balance of both personal and political change (White, 2008).

White (2008) and many others, including Connell (2003 and 2005b) and

Kimmel (1998) have suggested ways for men to move forward, i.e. to continue developing a masculinity that supports improved gender relations. Priorities that have been identified in order to address challenges and to move forward include: establishing and maintaining alliances and partnerships with various stakeholders including women advocates, building on existing gender equality structures, addressing multiple contexts and masculinities, building on positive attitudes of men, identifying and underlining the positive implications of gender equality for men, and increasing the international exchange of ideas and experiences (Connell, 2003). Larry May (1998) has for example proposed a model for developing a “progressive male standpoint” in four steps:

First, there is a striving for knowledge or understanding based on experience, especially personal experience of traditional male roles and activities. Second, there is a critical reflection on that experience in light of the possible harms to women, as well as men, of assuming traditional male roles and engaging in traditional male activities. Third, there is a moral motivation to change at least some aspects of traditional male roles and activities. And finally, there are practical proposals for changes in traditional male roles that are regarded as believable by other men (p. 337).

May’s (1998) example is one of many suggestions on how feminist men can move forward and engage in what he calls a “moral reconceptualization of masculinity” (p. 351).

This diversity has become even more apparent after the engagement of men with feminism and gender equality has gotten a global character, through international declarations and policies of international developmental organizations and as Connell has pointed out, men and boys are increasingly seen as “gatekeepers for gender equality” (Connell, 2005a, p. 1802). In light of this it is interesting for the focus of this study to see how these themes have evolved and developed, looking amongst other things at what can be learned from such work. In the following section I will

discuss recent research and writings about the status of work done in the name of men and masculinities, raising issues of what needs to change. I hope to reflect on a few questions, amongst them: What is the significance of focusing on men? What can we learn from what is being done in different parts of the world? Are men changing? What does engaging men mean? Does engaging men, lead to them being politicized?

Global and Transnational Trends

As stated previously, following the various movements and debates throughout the 1970's to the early 1990's, the focus on how to engage men in gender equality issues and social change through policy reform got increased attention and political support. The need for building awareness and capacities of men and boys in gender equality issues was identified as a strategic and crucial aspect in achieving sustainable progress in gender equality issues and a move towards social justice (Bannon and Correia, 2005, p. xvii). And as Frances Cleaver (2000) points out, the role of men in gender and developmental work had until then been limited.

So by the end of the 1990's the need for building awareness and capacities of men and boys in gender equality issues was being advocated on the global political and policy level as a strategic and crucial component in achieving sustainable progress in gender equality issues and a move towards social justice. This approach was first articulated on an international level at the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), challenging men to contribute to the struggle for gender equality (Cornwall et al, 2011, p. 4). More crucially, the following year, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, Governments were called upon to encourage men to engage in gender equality issues

(par. 25). The platform articulated the importance of shared responsibility, arguing that partnership with men was key in addressing women's rights issues. The issues highlighted to this end were: sharing equally childcare and household work, as well as men's role in HIV and sexually transmitted infections (Cornwall et al., 4, Beijing Platform). Since then the call for men's participation has been repeated on many occasions and through various initiatives, including a number of times by the UN Commission on the Status of Women (2004), the Council of the European Union (2006) and the Council of Europe (2008), as well as various national governments.¹¹ And the year 2014 has also seen a very high profile reiteration of this by the UN, through the HeForShe campaign, spearheaded by Emma Watson, good will ambassador to UN Women (September 2014).¹²

The fact that the issue of engaging men has become a global phenomenon through international development can be linked to the increased globalized and transnational nature of masculinities. Amongst others Connell (2005) and Hearn and Blagojević (2013) stress the importance of addressing the abovementioned global nature of changing gender relations and hierarchies. Pease and Pringle (2001) highlight the importance of looking at and examining masculinities from more than a local perspective, to have a comparative approach that looks at local, regional and global characteristics. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out that this is important not only to track "positive" trends in masculinities, but even more importantly to look at various "protest" masculinities, as exemplified in Kimmel's (2005) work on white supremacists in the United States and Europe and terrorist movements from the Middle East. With this in mind Connell and Messerschmidt

¹¹ Further research and strategies: e.g. Men's Panel Norway, Holter, Svare, Engeland, 2009; Coalition on Men and Boys UK, Ruxton, 2009; IMAGES - International Men and Gender Equality Survey, Barker, 2011; CROME Critical Research on Men in Europe Hearn, 2006; and Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale, Dover, 93).

¹² UN Women 2014, <http://www.heforshe.org/>

(2005) point out that hegemonic masculinities can be examined from three perspectives: the local, regional and global, going on to say:

Not only do links between these levels exist; they can be important in gender politics. Global institutions pressure regional and local gender orders; while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local gender dynamics. (2005, p. 849).

In line with this, Hearn (2011) also proposes using the tools and pathways of the globalized world, like information and communication technology, to counteract transnational patriarchal structures.

Relating to the framework of transnational, one regional setting emerges as significant for my research, that is the Nordic context. For the last few decades the welfare model of the Nordic countries has been a reference and point of comparison for social and welfare based policy and reform, throughout the rest of Europe, but also to other parts of the world (see Melby, Wetterberg and Ravn, 2008). And even more so, it has been an issue of pride for the Nordic States (Lister et al, 2008, p. 215).

The Nordic countries are usually listed in the top places of international gender gap indexes, including the World Economic Forum¹³, where they have held the top five places for several years. As Lister (2008) points out, women have reached far in the public and political sphere in these countries, due to the decade long political activism of feminist movement's (p. 215). These developments have entailed the participation of men in various ways in all of the Nordic countries, including the establishment of Men's Committees from the 1980's onwards. The most extensive policy endeavor concerning men in the Nordic countries has been focused on father's paternity leave, which has been implemented to a various degree in the Nordic

¹³ World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2013: <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2013>

countries (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008). Despite success with such gender equality policies, Lister (2008) and Borchorst (2008) point out that all the Nordic countries display discrepancies between the legal framework and the implementation of policies. Fiig (2008) also points out that the “discourse of utopia” (p. 199) that the Nordic countries have been actively claiming to have achieved, is marred with many inequalities, including a high rate of sexual based and domestic/partner violence (Pringle, 2008). In addition the notion that there is a Nordic Model of Gender Equality can easily be disputed, since most of the countries have developed very different approaches and legal frameworks (Christensen, 2008). More concretely the utopian image is being challenged by increased anti-feminist backlashes, and as Johannssona and Lilja (2013) point out (citing Hultman), even in Sweden:

The Swedish feminist party FI (Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)) is a marginalized voice, with not even 1% of the vote, while the xenophobic and anti-feminist party SD (Sverigedemokraterna (the Sweden Democrats)) is the third biggest party in Sweden. Moreover, the phrase “wronged white men” has popped up lately in the debate, referring to some men’s expressions of indignation over political correctness and men’s perceived marginalization under feminist discourse. (p. 271).

As this example illustrates, what it means to engage men is still something that continues to be a challenge. Does engaging men necessarily mean that they are changing or that they need to be politicized? Let’s take a closer look at that in the next sections.

Changing and Politicizing Masculinities

All of this talk about men and masculinities in development of course calls for one fundamental question: Does involving men work? Following a symposium in Dakar,

Senegal, in 2007, titled *Politicising Masculinities*, where the status of men and masculinity in development and how to devise ways to move forward, was discussed (Esplen and Greig, 2008), the following areas of progress were pointed out:

... men can change and are changing (since masculinities are socially constructed they can be reconstructed); men's resistance to hegemonic forms of masculinity is possible and can be motivated by highlighting the costs of masculinity for men; much work with men and boys treads carefully with a desire not to 'turn men off' or to blame them individually for the injustices and harms of patriarchy; (Edström et al, 2014, p. 2).

Harris (1995) expresses in general terms, that there are "positive aspects of male gender identities" that can be applied to provide positive change in gender regimes and in the behavior of men. The question of course is, how do we do this? How do we address the negatives aspects of men's behavior? Well as Harris suggests, by taking a look at positive aspects of male behavior, or as Gary Barker has stated:

But there are always exceptions and there is always potential for change. It is these exceptions that provide a point of entry globally for the purposeful promotion of change in rigid gender orders. (Barker, 2005, p. 140).

Increasingly the premise that many studies and programs work with is, that men can change and are changing, and since masculinity is socially constructed, "it can be reconstructed" (Cornwall et al, 5; Hearn et al, 2011; Das and Singh, 2014). As mentioned previously a focus of many organizations, policies and initiatives, that have been working on men and gender issues, has been work focused on combating gender based violence (Greig, 2011) and HIV (Cornwall et al, 1). The work on these issues is however quite diverse and has many gender transformative implications. Also the topics and issues related to men and masculinity that are getting more attention, are becoming more and more diverse, providing even more insights into the experiences of men. For example in the last decade a lot of interest has been on

looking at men and care issues, more specifically men and fatherhood (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008; Barker, 2014) and men's health issues have gotten increased attention (Baker, 2001; Robertsson, 2007). In addition, more and more organizations are working with boys and men in addressing some of these issues, as well as increasing their awareness on gender issues. A good example of this is *Promundo*, an international organization founded in Brazil in 1997. They work towards increasing “gender literacy” (Barker et al, 2011)

we are convinced that a reflection about men and masculinities and about the costs of hegemonic, non-equitable and violent masculinities needs to be and can be part of public policies, and that this approach can lead to positive changes in the lives of children, women and men. ... we see ourselves as promoting ‘gender literacy’ not only among individuals at the community level, but also among a cohort of partner civil society organizations and policy makers. And we believe that this ‘gender literacy’ – and a sustained commitment to gender justice – when combined with a sustained commitment to addressing social inequalities, can lead to real, long-term change (p. 183).

Hearn (2011) however points out that it is important to understand the complicated relationship between gender and policy and how men and masculinities are located in that intersection. Therefore it is important to look critically at how policy situates and addresses men and gender issues (p. 158-9).

However, as the Swedish example stated previously indicates, even though things are changing in many contexts, i.e. gender relations and men's attitudes and behaviors, it is easier said than done. Recently an increasing number international development researchers, have been stressing the importance of not only creating policy and program frameworks that work towards changing men, but also politicize them. The following quote from Jerker Edström captures the current sentiment of many academics working with men and masculinities, in development and elsewhere.

what may be needed more than anything is to really start making the work more explicitly political as well as personal. And, that will mean not just personally ‘doing the right thing’ in some self-seeking kind of way, but actually getting more personal and reflective about our own various privileges; particularly as men (of any race, class or sexuality, etc.), but also as whites (including LGBTI, working class, etc.), as able-bodied or as upper/middle class and so on. (Edström, 2014, p. 121)

Consequently, and as stated during the Dakar symposium, referred to previously, (Esplen and Greig 2008), it has been pointed out in recent publications about the role of men and masculinities in development (Cornwall, Edström and Greig, eds., 2011; IDS Bulletin, January 2014), that during the last decade, that even though *men and masculinities* has in fact had a greater presence in international development and gender equality work Cornwall et al (2011), point out that there is not as much activity to be found in addressing men’s privilege and dominance in the political and economic sphere. They point out that those organizations that focus on gender-equality work with men: “... are often surprisingly silent when it comes to gender injustice in the public sphere” (p. 1). It has become commonplace that the application of gender in developmental initiatives is superficial and devoid of proper transformative impact (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007).

This “instrumentalised” application of gender overlooks the structural nature of gender-based disparities, or rather power “has come to be represented as something that can be bestowed or acquired rather than a structural relation that is in itself gendered” (Cornwall et al, 2011, p. 1). Therefore more feminist activists and academics have been arguing for a deeper and more politicized approach to involving men and masculinities in gender and development initiatives (Cornwall et al, 2011, p. 6). It is argued that despite a lot of important work that has been done in various initiatives and countries, there is a need for more progressive work. The selective use of the *men and masculinities* concept by developmental actors has led too certain

“sensitive” issues being avoided and more fundamental issues are sidelined (Cornwall et al, 2011, p. 6). In addition more critical analysis of men’s positions and practices are avoided or ignored, therefore missing important aspects of both individual and broader gendered power relations.

In light of the various and complex work being done on men and masculinities related to development, the following question comes to mind: what is the way forward/what are the next steps? Cornwall, Edström and Greig (2011) suggest that in order to politicize masculinities, there needs to be more focus on “reflexive self-awareness” in gender initiatives (p. 13). This would enable constructive political collaborations that would avoid reproducing patterns and structures of oppressive male conduct. Devising and creating partnerships that merge personal change with political engagement, can lead to effective alliances with women’s organizations (p. 13). Therefore, more and more activists are calling for returning to the radical foundations of working with men and masculinities, looking at their relation to power (p. 15). Therefore it is important to see how to go beyond approaches that reaffirm gender hierarchies and gender stereotypes, which unfortunately most of the major developmental agencies incorporate in their strategies and programming (Silberschmidt, 2011, p. 98).

Combating Violence Against Women

As mentioned above, combating violence against women is a very common focus of work that engages men in gender equality developmental work, something that is also very much reflected in the Icelandic context. Michael Flood states

One of the most significant efforts to alter men's involvements in gender relations centers on men's violence against women. There is a growing consensus in violence prevention circles that to end this violence, we must involve and work with men. While men have long been addressed in secondary- and tertiary-based interventions as perpetrators, now they are also being addressed as "partners" in prevention ... (2011b, p. 359).

He goes on to point out that an increasing number of initiatives have emerged that involve men and boys in combating violence against women in various ways, including in education programs, awareness raising campaigns; as policy makers, activists, advocates and gatekeepers. This growing collection of insights into how to create effective prevention strategies for men and boys, is often linked with work on engaging men in building a more equal society (Flood, 2011b, p. 359). He goes on to point out that there are strong feminist arguments for engaging men in ending violence against women:

First and most importantly, efforts to prevent violence against women must address men because largely it is men who perpetrate this violence.

...

Second, constructions of masculinity play a crucial role in shaping violence against women: at the individual level, in families and relationships, in communities, and societies as a whole.

...

and ... that men have a positive role to play in helping to stop violence against women. Violence is an issue of concern to women and men alike and men have a stake in ending violence against women. (p. 359).

Flood (2011b) goes on to argue that working with men on this issue has already shown significant levels of success in changing attitudes and behavior concerning violence against women. However he points out that studies show that this work needs to be expanded, using the growing body of national and international legal declarations and strategies that provide a legitimacy and weight to further implementation, towards "systematic, large-scale, and

coordinated efforts” (p. 372). He argues that:

We will only make progress in preventing violence against women if we can change the attitudes, identities, and relations among some men, which sustain violence. To stop the physical and sexual assault of women and girls, we must erode the cultural and collective supports for violence found among many men and boys and replace them with norms of consent, sexual respect, and gender equality, and we must foster just and respectful gender relations in relationships, families, and communities. While some men are part of the problem, all men are part of the solution. (p. 372).

Challenges

As pointed out in the previous section, promoting gender equality amongst men has turned out to be a complex project, and researchers underline the fact that there are certain risks entailed in engaging men in a project that in principle works against their status of privilege (See Connell, 2003 & 2005b; Edwards, 2006). These risks include general resistance to this issue, challenges to masculine identities, backlash, negative effects on financial resources for initiatives that work towards empowering women and failed initiatives. Priorities that have been identified in order to address challenges and to move forward include: alliances and partnerships with various stakeholders including women advocates, building on existing gender equality structures, addressing multiple contexts and masculinities, building on positive attitudes of men, identifying and underlining the positive implications of gender equality for men, and increasing the international exchange of ideas and experiences (Connell, 2003). One of the challenges that have been mentioned repeatedly in the literature reviewed above is privilege, more precisely male privilege. I will attempt to bring forward some aspects related to this issue.

In the article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1988), Peggy McIntosh addresses the issues of male and white privilege in her work as

professor of gender studies:

I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended. (p. 1)

She understood that not only was this privilege mostly unrecognized and cites Elizabeth Minnich who pointed out that white people are brought up to see their lives as “morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1). Therefore it is crucial to identify and address the invisible nature of the social systems that maintain these privileges and enable the ensuing oppressions. Following McIntosh many other academics and activists have pointed out the invisible nature of privilege, including Michael Kimmel (2002):

Being white, or male, or heterosexual in this culture is like running with the wind at your back. It feels like just plain running, and we rarely if ever get a chance to see how we are sustained, supported, and even propelled by that wind. (p. 1).

On a related note and more recently, Marc Peters (2014) raises the following question: “how do we get people with tremendous societal privilege to work feverishly for equality when they do not share a fierce urgency of now?” (p. 99). Peters goes on to say that despite being exposed to the experiences of women and men who are not privy to the same privilege as he is, and throwing himself into studying African-American history and the women’s rights struggle, he realized: “No matter how hard I tried, I could not disavow them” (p. 100). Eventually he came to realize that unless the oppressive system goes through a fundamental overhaul, he

“will continue to be awarded unearned privilege and others will continue to suffer undue burdens” (p. 100).

To this end authors like Kimmel (2002) have pointed out that “Privilege needs to be made visible.” (p. 2). He points out, citing McIntosh:

One way to understand how privilege works - and how it is kept invisible - is to look at the way we think about inequality. We always think about inequality from the perspective of the one who is hurt by the inequality, not the one who is helped. (p. 4).

By switching the perspective on those who benefit from privilege, addressing it and highlighting its repercussions becomes more feasible and Kimmel (2002) concludes: “Examining our privilege may be uncomfortable at first, but it can also be energizing, motivating, and engaging.” (p. 6).

McIntosh, Kimmel and Peters show that acknowledging the existence of privilege is not sufficient. It is not enough for an individual that benefits from privilege to acknowledge it, that does not make it go away. As McIntosh mentioned above, people that benefit from privilege are not only mostly unaware of their privilege, some of them also adamantly deny having it or benefitting from it, when they are confronted about it or it is pointed out to them. But how best to address it?

As Pease (2010) asks: “What is the role of the privileged in working for social change? Can enlightened members of privileged groups be effective allies in combating oppression?” (p.171-2). He points out the assumption that many have regarding social change, that “only the oppressed can address oppression.” (p. 172) and states that:

Little attention has been given to how we might develop a pedagogy to transform the oppressors and the privileged. Challenging oppression from below should be the foundation for social change movements, yet such movements can be complemented by developing strategies to engage and address those who hold power that stand in the way of these movements. (p. 172)

Pease (2010) also points out, as others have above, that an important aspect, for men, in addressing and deconstructing their own privilege, is forming alliances or coalitions with feminist and women's organizations. He cites Schacht and Ewing (2001) that also identify six things for pro-feminist men to bear in mind to that end:

1. Acknowledge and give up their male privilege.
2. Be willing to apply feminist principles to their personal lives.
3. Make the elimination of oppression against women and people in general a central priority.
4. Advocate for social and institutional change.
5. Learn non-hierarchical forms of communication and decision-making.
6. Demonstrate respect for women and women's spaces. (Pease, 2010, p. 181-2).

Pease (2010) concludes his discussion of privilege by stating the following:

Meaningful and lasting change in the world, at personal, cultural and structural levels, will only occur through the combined efforts of the oppressed and those willing to forgo and challenge their privileges. (p. 187).

Other Challenges

Other challenges that are important to acknowledge briefly are for example: when men who enter or join feminist spaces, including women's and gender studies programs, feminist organizations or pro-feminist actions, display behavior that is not gender equal; when men that participate in feminist activities get special treatment and benefit the "glass escalator" (Williams, 1992); and the challenges of related to the concept of the political and personal and how feminist men, experience that.

Of the three, the first is in many ways the most challenging, especially since that issue could address everything from, showing resistance to acknowledging their privilege status, to displaying sexist attitudes, to "mansplaining", to perpetrating verbal, physical or sexual abuse. This of course covers a wide spectrum of behavior, but nonetheless stems from the same core, not fully facing sexist and misogynist

behavior or attitudes. There is not much literature to be found on examples of men who perpetrate violence in feminist spaces, but there are some recent writings about men in feminist organizations, especially experiences of and interactions with men in women's and gender studies at the University level. Flood (2011a) points out that for Women's and Gender Studies (WGS), men's participation in their programs has always been a challenge, both as a topic of research but also from a pedagogical perspective:

For men to study and teach WGS is to occupy a delicate and problematic position. Men's presence as students in feminist classrooms poses challenges to traditional constructions of feminist pedagogy and can generate patriarchal forms of relating and resistance. Yet, their involvement can prompt their personal and intellectual transformation, without significantly compromising similar transformations among female students. (p. 150).

Armato (2013) discusses the issue of male "enlightened sexism" that can appear in academic masculine attitudes and behavior (p. 578). He argues for the need of not only addressing the actions of such individuals, but also the inaction and silence from other "enlightened" men, calling for a *rigorous reflexivity*. He states:

Because of their relatively privileged status, all men in academia hold the potential to be wolves in sheep's clothing, but men in women's studies and related fields hold knowledge that makes them particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon (p. 596-7).

In closing

As evident through all the research and writings cited in this chapter, there are many factors to bear in mind when arguing for the engagement of men. Therefore the need to deepen the understanding of the role of men and boys in gender equality issues is crucial. The increasing international profile of this approach is to be welcomed, but the dissemination of the concept calls for a diligent endeavor in understanding the benefits and challenges of it. Therefore, I think it is useful to underscore what an

increasing number of academics and activists are stating, there is a need to make sure that work on men and gender in development is rooted in progressive feminist notions, that are devised and informed by local contexts and experiences. With that in mind, working with men towards gender justice is doable, if the objectives of the work is clearly defined and the approaches applied are feasible in the contexts they are being applied. In the findings chapter we will engage more concretely with the theoretical themes that have been discussed here.

IV. Methodology

Research Design

The methodology for this study is informed by research approaches developed within feminist and masculinity studies. In order to gain insights into the experiences of feminist men I rely on a qualitative and ethnographic approach. Judith Stacey (1995) points out, feminist research usually defies disciplinary borders and using the theoretical and research frameworks of one discipline is not sufficient for doing feminist research. Therefore I reach out to other nuanced qualitative methodologies, theorized and applied in feminist and masculine studies. As many qualitative researchers point out, the use of diverse approaches that characterize qualitative research methods, a deeper understanding of a topic is made possible (Creswell, 1998). This makes it possible to shed light on how informants understand and experience a particular topic (Kvale, 1996) and through inductive methods and the comparison of data the research can provide rich insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

In *Dislocating Masculinities* (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994) it is suggested “... that ethnographic studies of the production of gendered difference offer new ways of looking at ‘masculinity’ which take us beyond the strictures imposed by continued use of a single category, ‘men’...” (p. 10). This approach offers theories and methods that can help go through the multiple and intersectional perspectives that questions of gender and masculinity entail, including the relation among dominant and subordinate masculinities. This study also relies on research accumulated on the engagement of men in gender equality issues, through public policy analysis and developmental studies.

Through this I was hoping to address the complex nature of this research topic and therewith shed light onto the experiences of feminist men in Iceland. The subject matter of this study is a site where a number of issues intersect. First and foremost I am looking at Icelandic men of a certain age, i.e. young men aged somewhere between 18 and 30 years. Crucial to their experiences is their self-identification as feminists. This, however, does not mean that being a feminist has the same meaning or relevance for each of them. Most of my respondents describe very different definitions of feminisms; what it means to them and their paths towards identifying themselves as feminists, differ substantially. It is clear - based on their stories - that it is very important to take into consideration other important factors, including for example education, political views, sexuality and being “feminist men.” This study takes into consideration not only how these different factors add up when looking at the experiences of feminist men, but instead, as Crenshaw, Yuval-Davis and Fine have pointed out (2009), it is crucial to consider how different factors like race, gender, ethnicity or class interact, and look at the cumulative effects (p. 70). Kathy Davis has also pointed out that applying an intersectional feminist approach (which looks at all axis of identity, such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) “encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure” (p. 79). Crucial for this study is awareness of the complexities of the lived experiences of these men and not to presume a simple and uniform relation between these different factors.

Increasingly in the last few decades, the importance of acknowledging the position of the researcher; the relationship between the researcher and the informant; and the interpretative power that the researcher has; has emerged as a crucial methodological and epistemological tool and perspective (Sprague and Zimmerman,

1989). Therefore an important aspect of applying a feminist lens in qualitative and ethnographic research is addressing and problematizing the standpoint and positioning of the researcher (Stacey, 1988; DeVault, 1999). Addressing and integrating this into my study and analysis is vital, and keeping this in mind has helped address certain issues that have appeared during this research project.

I conducted in-depth semi structured interviews and I also conducted one participant observation. In the next section I will provide a description of the preparations for the interviews and the participant observation, including discussing some issues and challenges that came up leading up, during and after the interviews.

Preparing and conducting the interviews

For this study I conducted interviews with twenty-two individuals, starting in the summer of 2012 (using the same general framework of questions), while completing the majority of them during the summer of 2013. Out of the twenty-two, fifteen were young men in Iceland who define themselves as feminists and seven were experts on feminism and men's engagement in Iceland. In identifying interviewees, I approached people who are active in the field of feminist activism, teaching gender studies and/or working on the issues of engaging men in gender equality issues. I asked these contacts if they could recommend any young men that fit the criteria I was working with, i.e. young men aged 18-30 who define themselves as feminists and have been active or have engaged with feminism and feminist activism in some way in the last few years. Through this I ended up with over thirty recommendations and I proceeded in contacting most of them; some of them came recommended from more than one source. Almost all of them wrote back and showed interest in participating in this

study and in the end I managed to arrange interviews with fifteen of them.

Because the Icelandic feminist community is small and feminist men aged 18-30, is a very limited group of people, in addition to changing their names, I have had to consider other ways to keep the identity of my participants anonymous. Therefore I have had to be careful not to expose them in other ways, including being careful in how I describe them, not listing too many details and characteristics. Consequently I have chosen to discuss or portray them mostly in general terms and then when I refer to them or quote them I use descriptive information without exposing too much. In some cases I leave out most descriptions, because the identity of the interviewee is too easily exposed.

The young men I spoke with were aged 18-26, all involved in various social activisms, everything from clearly defined feminist activism to various other political activisms, including in anarchist movements and political parties. At least five of my interviewees were active in political parties (left wing) and all were involved in feminist work in those organizations or work that focused on gender equality. Most of those that were active in feminist work within their political parties were also involved in other feminist activism, within defined feminist organizations and NGO's, or in particular feminist actions or projects. Most of the activism focused on gender-based violence and more particularly on raising awareness on violence against women. A few of my respondents focused their activism on being engaged on various Internet platforms, disseminating feminist material or challenging misogynist statements or behavior. Other background characteristics: three of them had been involved in LGBTQI work and two of my respondents identified themselves within some of those categories, in addition two of my respondents were non- or partly non-Icelandic and quite a few of my respondents had lived part of their life abroad, either

during childhood or as part of their studies. Over half were either university graduates or were doing their undergraduate or graduate studies (in Iceland or abroad) during the period I interviewed them. Four of my respondents were enrolled in gender studies and 4 of my respondents had been exposed to gender studies in their high school studies.

My group of experts, were all in all seven respondents: three women and four men, in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Three of them are university professors, one is a high school teacher and three are feminist and gender equality advocates, professional and grass-roots. I selected them with their diverse knowledge and experience of feminist activism in mind, spanning in some cases a few decades and various sectors, including grassroots activism, university level gender studies and gender equality advocacy and policy. They helped me to provide a more comparative background, to see how things have developed through between periods.

For the interviews I developed an interview guide that entailed sets of questions, one set for the young men and one for the group of experts, which were designed in such a way that they would capture certain themes. In the interviews, I did not read them out one by one, word for word, but instead I referred to them and checked once in a while to see if we were covering most of the themes. I attempted this approach in order to foster an atmosphere in which my respondents would feel comfortable and would be able to talk about these topics in a way that suited the way they wanted to tell their story. The questions are attached at the end of the thesis as appendices section.

In the interviews with the young men I covered the following themes: Introductory questions that focused on their definitions of amongst other things, gender equality, how they define themselves (as feminists, pro-feminists or so forth),

and how they see the role of men in the struggle for gender equality; In the second category of questions I focused on their own participation in feminist or gender equality focused actions, what it has entailed and how that experienced has been; In the third set of questions I went further into these experiences and what meaning they have had for them personally; In the end of the interview I tried to sum up some of the things we talked about, encouraging my respondents to add something that they found that was not covered. In the interviews with the “experts”, I focused more on getting a sense for how the participation of men has developed in recent years, what the most common characteristics of this development are, whether there is a difference between periods, how best to describe the participation of men’s engagement today, and so forth.

For the participant observation I observed the Slutwalk Reykjavík March¹⁴ in July 2013. I attempted to contact a few activist groups that I was hoping to observe and interact with. After trying to contact them a few times without hearing back from them, I ended up focusing on the Slutwalk march. I participated in the march, taking notes, pictures and videos, in order to observe the participation of men, looking at the extent of their engagement and in what way they interacted with women participated in the event.

After having conducted the interviews and the participatory observation, I transcribed the interviews and observations. In that process I already started making notes, outlining themes and patterns. As soon as I had completed some of the interviews I started actively coding and analyzing them, going back to them repeatedly after having transcribed and analyzed more interviews.

¹⁴ Slutwalk: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SlutWalk>

Some Challenges

As with any study, various challenges came up during the span of this research project. Some of those challenges could be predicted or foreseen, others were more of a surprise and some were quite trying, having quite an impact on some aspects of the research. I will attempt to address some of the issues that came up.

There were a few practical challenges, which included for example identifying young men who fit the criteria I was working with, identifying suitable settings for a participant observation and formulating interview questions that would capture the experiences of young men and feminism. In order to identify men to interview I asked people that I knew and had been working with feminism and gender equality issues in various ways. With this, I was hoping to reach men that not only fit the criteria, but also men that I didn't know, and as mentioned above, this gave me a list of over 30 men. In addition I was hoping that by using this approach I would have men that in a way would be vouched for, that is that their credentials as feminists or gender equality advocates would be confirmed by people that I knew and trusted. I realized while planning for this research, based partly on my own experiences working on engaging men in feminist issues, that it was not sufficient in itself that a man declared himself a feminist or identified publicly as such. As the history of men's engagement had shown us through the years, someone (man or a woman) identifying as a feminist is no guarantee that that person would necessarily be one in practice. This approach of course would in no way be foolproof in preventing "bad apples" from slipping in. As it turned out, avoiding that ended up being easier said than done. I will elaborate on that point further on in this chapter.

Another practical challenge that came up concerns the interview process itself. In the planning process I expected it to be a challenge to develop a set of questions

that would enable me to capture the experiences of these men. Therefore it was very important for me to be aware of the questions I was asking and the preconceptions and definitions I was working with. I learned from my preparatory interviews that it can be difficult for some respondents to express themselves on their experiences, also since I was trying to get them to reflect on things that they hadn't necessarily thought about in detail. What emerged from some interviews was that some of the terms that I took more or less for granted, like gender equality and even concepts like "engaging men", turned out to be a challenge for some of my respondents. In addition, I realized early on that it was challenging to pack all the themes I had identified into one hour long interview, which led to many of the interviews going on for almost ninety minutes.

My position

As I have mentioned above, this research topic is something that I am personally very engaged with. In the last ten years I have been involved in gender equality issues and feminist public actions in Iceland, focusing on the engagement of men. In light of this it was clear to me, as soon as I identified the topic and even more so when I started working on the actual research, that I had to address my standpoint and relationship to the topic. This included being aware of my expectations and hopes for the research, my choice of data and sources and my interactions with my informants, amongst other things. It also made me aware of possible problems, including: taking things for granted that would not necessarily be so for an outsider; that the informants would not articulate certain things they would expect me to be aware of; that my informants would shy from talking critically about things or activities they know I have been

engaged with. Even though this interest and relationship with the topic provided me with a very good advantage in identifying and accessing interview informants amongst other things, I had to be very aware of the vicinity and relationship I have with the subject matter. In an attempt to counteract this, I picked an age group that is considerably younger than me and identified young men that have been active mostly in the last five years, a period I have not been active in public activism in Iceland.

It was not sufficient to only make my standpoint clear, but I also needed to be very aware of my interactions with the topic and in some way to critically address my insider/outsider position. Therefore I decided that I needed to map out, or at least to be aware of, (for the lack of a better word) what baggage I carried with me into this research. To this end I looked at the use of autographical/personal writing in social research, more specifically in feminist and qualitative research. This included Lorraine Code's (1995) description of the importance of developing "an epistemology of everyday life", in which knowledge is examined in its production during various human activities, as well as Marjorie DeVault's (1997) and Liz Stanley's (1993) discussions on the importance of auto/biography in social research, stressing the importance of concepts like reflexivity. I also considered how Judith Cook and Mary Fonow (1986) have argued that reflexivity is one of five principles of feminist methodology. Reflexivity serves as fundamental to the other principles, which in addition to conscious-raising, is a key way to engage with the social world; rejecting the binary of objectivity and subjectivity; to research and theorize experience; and finally strongly emphasizing a focus on ethics. Related to this I also looked at creative writing approaches that researchers have increasingly been using in order to address issues of knowledge production, the role of the researcher and his/her experiences in relation to the research, including Laurel Richardson's (2005) statement that "the

ethnographic project as humanly situated” (p. 7) and the importance of renewing the toolbox and develop new ways of knowing. She points out that it is important to recognize that the ethnographic life is not separable from the Self (ibid, 8). Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005) agrees with Richardson in the need “to think of writing as a method of qualitative inquiry” (p. 11).

In order to engage with some of the issues I have mentioned I conducted a few writing exercises. In these exercises I played around with my own personal and somewhat autobiographical insights, inspired by the themes that have appeared in the process of collecting and analyzing the data for my research project. This provided me with interesting insights into both my standpoint but also into the topic itself. This has, I believe, led to a deeper and richer understanding of various aspects of being and becoming a male feminist. Therefore, I not only believe that becoming and being a feminist is a journey, but that engaging with its challenges like for example male privilege is a process in itself, and needs to be looked at in systemized way in order to more fully identify its role and repercussions. Other themes that my respondents talked about and resonated with my experiences included: the crucial role of men in combating violence against women, how to interact with dominant male culture, what feminism has meant to them personally and how to encourage more men to engage with feminism.

Amongst the things I have realized through this exercise is since I have such a personal connection with the topic, I not only have to engage with my positioning, I have to be aware of what meaning I put into certain notions and concepts. How can I expect my respondents to engage with my questions and share their experiences and challenges, if I myself have not done the same? That is, how can I expect them to think about their journey and identify important landmarks in their journey, if I

myself have not done the same, and not faced these experiences and challenges head on? This is where writing about it and using an autobiographical lens has been very useful.

One set of challenges that I became aware of during the research, concerned what I referred to above in the process of identifying men for my study; what if some of the men I talked with, despite being vouched for by my contacts, were not feminists? And maybe more concerning, what if some of them were perpetrators and had assaulted or abused a women. This potential issue came up in a few discussions, without any specific indications. I could not see how I could confirm these suspicions or even if it was possible to so. I realized through contemplating both the possibility of something like this coming up while researching feminist men, was of course always likely. Not only would it not be very evident what to do if a researcher encountered such a dilemma. But also it would most likely be impossible to avoid something like this coming up when doing a study such as this one. This issue clearly cuts across ethical, practical and theoretical aspects of conducting research. Contemplating this brings out more then a few questions, including the following: What happens when allies turn out to be non-allies? What implication does that have for engaging men in feminist and gender quality issues? And what can be done to prevent non-allies to infiltrate feminist organizations and activities? I will attempt to engage further with these and other related questions and implications in the findings and conclusion chapters.

In this chapter I have provided a summary of the methodology of this study, including the research design, the methods applied, a profile of my informants, and other practical issues, including various challenges that came up. In the next chapter I will

present the main findings.

V. Findings

Introduction

This chapter is based on the findings that emerged from the analysis of interviews I conducted with 15 men, as described previously in the methodology chapter. In addition to relying on the stories from these young men, I also refer to interviews with 7 experts, only to add background and detail. Even though, I still refer to the research questions I started out with, I base this chapter also on the themes and new questions that emerged through the analysis. The questions that emerged include: Is it possible to claim that there is currently a shift, or a turn, taking place in feminist activism and debate in Iceland, which includes an increased participation of men? Does the increased number of men identifying themselves as feminist, entail a shift in paradigm, an actual change? To what can we ascribe the seemingly increased participation of men in feminist activities and debates? Can the wider, societal reasons for these developments be identified? What can we learn from the increased participation of men in Iceland?

In the interviews my informants touched on many subthemes that relate to the broader topic in different ways. I, of course, cannot layout all of them in this chapter, but I will focus on the most significant ones that capture their experiences and insights, and address the questions I set out with, in addition to new questions that emerged (as listed above). In order to engage with the themes that surfaced, I will bring some of the theoretical themes and perspectives addressed in the third chapter, as well as some of the historical themes covered in the second chapter. In the last section of this chapter I will provide a brief summary.

A New Turn

In line with the discussion in the second chapter, about the improved profile of feminist issues and gender equality in public and political debate in Iceland, many of my respondents stated that in the last few years the feminist debate in Icelandic society had in general expanded. According to them this increased profile included, more positive media coverage, public discussions and events, feminist actions, establishment of various feminist associations and more women and men coming out publicly as feminists. The period they are referring to, 2009-2013, aligned with Iceland having its first female prime minister, who led a two party left-wing coalition, and as discussed in chapter 2, both parties are declared women's rights and feminist parties. As stated in the second chapter, the left-wing government led a post-crisis program which had a strong focus on gender equality based legislation and strategies, including some strategies focused on improving gender equality issues in education.

So in some ways one can state that the issue of gender equality and feminism had a strong presence in public debate. Interestingly enough, some of my respondents actually claimed “feminism was *in*” or even “fashionable.” One of my respondents, Viktor, a 22 year old university student, pointed out that when he was in his last year in high school (i.e 19 years old), he enrolled in a new elective course in gender studies. The faculty was expecting a nice small number of students, but instead the number of students totally took them by surprise and the teachers ended up setting up two big groups to make space for everyone. According to some of my respondents, to everyone's surprise the topic of gender studies and feminism had become “fashionable”.

When contemplating why feminism had become “fashionable” my respondents gave many reasons, one of the reasons given in the interviews, was that people had had enough of gender inequalities. Alexander, a 23 year old student and political activist, puts it in the following way:

Of course one always hears from feminists, but I find it has been on the increase, just in the last five years. I think because people are totally fed up, people have had more then enough.

Most of my respondents described various developments in feminist activism and debates that seem to have contributed to a more engaged feminist scene. In the last few years a number of high-profile sexual violence cases, including child abuse, rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment cases, have been getting more public attention and coverage in the media. According to my respondents Gender based violence (GBV) or more specifically violence against Women (VAW) still seems to be a key issue that mobilizes public discussion and public actions, as described in chapter two. This also reflects Flood’s (2011b) point of the centrality that combating VAW issues seems to be in many debates and initiatives that focus on gender equality issues. In this case, it seems VAW cases and debates can have a strong motivating effect. Why that is so is maybe hard to pin down, but lets see if the discussion further along can shed light on that.

Other examples my respondents referred to repeatedly, concerned online activism, a medium that seems to play a central role in the feminist engagement of my informants. Most of them referred to a few online feminist activists and forums that have managed to capture the attention of the public and traditional media. These activists focused amongst other things on bringing to light everyday sexism, and disseminating articles and other material on various issues. Other examples of important online activities that they believe have opened the debate, or as one of my

respondents Björssi pointed out “opened the floodgates.” In this context Björssi was referring to a series of open letters, some anonymous and some in name, where women shared online their stories of sexual abuse and what affect these experiences had on their lives. The example he is referring to started with one anonymous open letter being published on Facebook, which then quickly went viral and then a blog was set up where more women started posting their stories, and this led to a floodgate of stories. Björssi believes that in addition to getting substantial media attention, it also led to a lot more people, both women and men, becoming more aware of the prevalence of sexual violence cases around them and the consequences that they involve.

The events referred to, took place leading up to the second “Slutwalk” (Icelandic: “Drusluganga”) that took place in Reykjavík, July 2012. The “Slutwalk” in Iceland has been organized since by various activists from various movements and includes a March in downtown Reykjavík, preempted by a media campaign. The Walk has continued to grow since its initial manifestation in 2011, and thousands of people of different ages attend it, including a number of men of all ages.

As mentioned above, the focus on VAW has always been central to feminist activism and advocacy in Iceland, all through the 1970’s to the beginning of the 21st century. Despite this trend not being a new one, it is important to look at what is different in the movements that seem to be emerging in the last few years. We will take a closer look at this below, but first we will take a closer look at the statement that “feminism is in fashion.”

“Feminism is in fashion”

Most of my respondents point out that feminism seems to be in some way “in fashion.” But what does that entail? And not only does it seem to be in style, it also seems to arrive out of nowhere. At least that is how Adam, a 23 years old university student, describes it, quite surprised about the emerging number of feminists, that seemed to have appeared almost unexpectedly, during 2012-2013. He describes how there were suddenly a lot of people involved in feminism, it seemed like everyone was a feminist:

People are popping up everywhere, where one does not necessarily expect them. Its kind of like in the movie Fight Club, no one did anything, it just somehow happened by itself.

However, despite Adam’s surprise, he and other of my respondents were aware that this did not come from out of nowhere. They were aware, to a varying degree, that there was a long history of women’s and feminist movements that cleared the path. But it was clear to my respondents that the current discourse had some crucial differences. One significant development that emerged 2011 onwards was the establishment of an increasing number of feminist or gender equality organisations. In a growing number of high schools, which in some cases have had elective gender studies courses on offer, students seem to be taking things into their own hands. As my interviewees pointed out, students in a number of high schools, have been founding student feminist associations, where young men are quite involved, in some cases men are chairing these associations. These associations seem quite active, in e.g. setting up Facebook pages for discussions, which play a central role for these organisations, and different kind of events and activities. In one high school the feminist Facebook group has a few hundred members. In 2013 and 2014, more than 10 different high school feminist associations were founded in different parts of

Iceland, which led to the foundation of a national association of high school feminist associations.

As shown in the examples above, Internet and social media sites like Facebook have become instrumental, and in fact crucial, in providing a platform for discussion and dissemination of various materials on feminism. For example in 2011 a new site called “Knúz”, that publishes daily articles on feminism and related issues, has currently (September, 2014) 4800 followers on Facebook. Respondents like Erik, believe that the Internet provides great opportunities for addressing these issues. But they point out that the Internet is also a setting where anti-feminist sentiments run rampant and misconceptions of what feminism is, thrive. Alexander describes how “one spends a whole lot of time on the Internet, trying to put out fires.”

Examples like these show that there are of course still plenty of challenges even though there are signs of positive progress. One challenge or issue that some of my respondents raised is, that can be related to the issue feminism being “in fashion.” In some ways, in some circles, feminism is very much not in “fashion”, in light of the many negative and aggressive misconceptions of feminism that my respondents all refer to. Those sentiments also live a strong life on the Internet and various social media. However amongst those that identify as feminists, the definitions of feminism being applied can vary a lot or tend to be quite vague. Adam points out that the concept has in some ways been normalized, and you would talk with people who would claim: “Yes, I am of course a feminist,” without being able to elaborate further on what that entails.

In this context it is interesting to refer to Demetriou’s (2001) and Bridges (2014) discussion about hybrid masculinities, referred to previously. Because, as some of my respondents point out, an interesting aspect of the seeming popularity of

feminism amongst young women and men, is the fact that for some people, including men, it has become “a taboo to be an anti-feminist” (Baldvin). One could in fact make comparisons with how Demetriou and Bridges point out the “flexibility of contemporary masculinities” (Bridges, 2014, p. 79). And instead of men adopting a gay aesthetic, in this context, some men seem to “embrace” feminist ideals, or at least not openly dismiss them. One could say that this practice is maybe performed, because as one of my respondents put it, “no one wants to seem anti-feminist”.

Georg describes this in a similar way and points out that since it is less acceptable to talk against feminism and especially gender equality, more and more young men, end talking around the issue, neither fully showing support on the issue and also not talking openly against it. Georg also points out that this applies to both sides of the issue. A certain frame has evolved, within which the discussion can take place or is considered acceptable, a middle ground where extremes on both sides are excluded or condemned. If you cross the line and express too “radical” feminist notions, you can also end up discounted. Following the reference to Demetrio and Bridges, it might be useful to remind us of some of the points raised by Cornwell et al (2011) and Edström (2014), of how sometimes engaging men initiatives end up taking a “softer” approach towards men, and therefore sidelining many fundamental but “sensitive” issues (Edström, 2014, p. 6). So since being a feminist seems to be have become more normalized, and taking a cue from Cornwell and Edström, one could ask, how “politicized” are the men that identify as feminist? Lets start to look at the environment that my respondents describe, that seems to be conducive to more men being involved in feminism or at least identifying themselves as feminists.

More Space for Men

Even though the definitions of what it means or entails to be a feminist are not always clear, my respondents had a very positive view about the number of and visibility of men participating in feminist actions or debates. Many actually proclaimed that there are currently more men involved in feminism, i.e. more men that claim themselves as feminists than before. In addition, the call for more men has become increasingly pronounced. As my respondents points out, there are more and more public calls for more men to engage with feminism, which very often is done in the context of fighting gender based violence. For example during the “Slutwalk” campaign of 2013, keynote speakers articulated the crucial importance of men getting involved in ending violence against women, which some have stated as being the next stage, or rather now it is “men’s turn.” (Bjössi).

This development, can be seen, not only in light of the growing profile of men in feminist and gender equality issues, since the mid 1990’s when the first Men’s committees were formed, or the anti gender based violence campaigns of the NEI/Men’s Group of the Feminist Association of Iceland, along with other initiatives referred to in chapter 2; but also in light of the growing focus on men in international development. A very recent example of this is the *HeForShe* campaign that UN Women launched in September 2014, mentioned above. This campaign had a global and developmental focus, encouraging men all over the world to join the call for the end of gender inequality. By September 27th, less than a week after the launch of the campaign 7588 men in Iceland had signed the call, out of 150, 905 globally. These numbers of course need to be looked at closer and it is very difficult to assess or confirm the sentiments behind these signatures. They however provide an interesting look into the transnational and global (Connell, 2005 and Hearn and Blagojević,

2013) nature of engaging men. Baring this in mind, one can deliberate on why there seems to be a growing number of men interested in feminism.

When asked why there seem to be more men involved in feminism, in addition to a seeming increase in feminist activity in general, my respondents talk about there being more “space” or more “forums” for people and for men to participate and engage with these issues. My respondents point out that several developments, some mentioned previously, have contributed to the discussion changing and opening up. There is now a space for men to proclaim that they are feminists and participate in feminist activism and debates, even though Georg has pointed out that there are certain restrictions. What has created this space is of course hard to identify, but several respondents repeat, what was mentioned above, that now feminism seems fashionable, and also the other side of the coin, it is un-fashionable to seem anti-feminist. One of my expert respondents mentioned that one possible explanation for the existence of a positive space for feminism is the current “hipster” fashion. She explained that in light of the average “hipster” individual, portraying a socially responsible attitude, supporting environmental issues and human rights, is at the core of the “hipster” image.

This is an explanation that is hard to nail down, but there is however something to consider when looking at a group that is preoccupied with image and a particular kind of consumerism. Currently there is not much research around that takes a look at *hipster* culture, even less that looks at it from a gender or masculine perspective. But it might be useful to remind us of Demetriou’s and Bridges’ discussion on *hybrid masculinities*, and the role of elements from subordinate masculinities being appropriated in order to present a more, at least seemingly, gender equitable hegemonic masculinity. One point that one of my respondents makes, is

important to bare in mind, *hipster* culture seems to make a significant central role of modern technology and social media, which has been mentioned above as being an important factor in communicating new trends, like feminism.

Above we have attempted to map the landscape of feminism and the space for men's participation currently in Iceland, as my respondents have described them. But now we will take a look at some aspects of my respondents' experiences of being feminist, including what inspired them to take this step and so forth. Lets put fashion and lifestyles to the side, for now, and take a look at the more personal characteristics of men's involvement with feminism.

Inspiration

In line with White's (2008) argument for the importance of looking at how men become feminists, including the personal, emotional and social challenges that it entails, my informants usually referred to personal experiences that inspired them to think about feminist issues, when they were asked what inspired them or served as a starting point to their engagement in feminist issues. In most cases these experiences involved realizing that there are many experiences that women have, that men never experience. Gunnar explains how he realized this when he was given a book that inspired him, reading it lead to him having a revelation:

I swallowed it up and I think it was because I learned so much about women from reading it, I think that is what did the trick, I read 50 pages about menstruation and learned about a side to women and moving through the world as a human being, experiencing period blood, experiencing sexual violence, that I had never thought about before.

Echoing the discussion on privilege above, including the insights of McIntosh (1988), Kimmel (2002) and Pease (2010), he goes on to say that reading these descriptions of women's experiences made him think differently about his own position: "The book made me look at my own privilege, made me realize that privilege is invisible to anyone that has it and I suppose I started to always question my own privilege." Later on he adds to this realization that not only does he not have personal insights of these very specific experiences, by pointing out that "Men have different experiences as women, I cannot have a discussion about the experience of pregnancy or menstruation or sexual violence." In a similar vein Einar describes how when he was younger he experienced an interest and curiosity, almost a thirst for more knowledge, i.e. literature and activity on feminist issues and women's experiences. This interest drew him into feminism.

I envy women so much, for having all this feminist literature, like *Women, know your body*, and *Our bodies, Ourselves* and Beth Dodson, she organizes masturbation circles for women. Can you imagine something like that for men, where men would meet and masturbate together to get to know their bodies more intimately?

He goes on to point out that this is part of the problem, the fact that he does not have a positive reaction to this image and says that the attempts to address these issues amongst men have been "half-assed attempts with soft men and metrosexuals." He finds that this area of male experience needs to be explored a lot further and he looks forward to seeing something substantial emerge. For him it was very important in his formative years to be exposed to things that challenged current social norms and he cites queer history as an important source, and more specifically popular culture.

How role models emerge? How people break down walls, like Boy

George¹⁵. Who is a very good example of how suddenly something was possible that was not conceivable earlier and lead to many other things, suddenly “This is possible and I am also going to do this.”

All of my respondents talked about the importance of being exposed to different role models, including male high school teachers declaring themselves feminists and teaching gender studies, and perspectives of women’s experience, that they wouldn’t have been exposed to otherwise, in mainstream male culture. For most of my respondents it was difficult to identify just one thing or event that led them to becoming interested and engaged in feminism. It seems in most cases to have been a slow process that included many little realizations and discoveries. However for most of the men becoming aware of violence against women was a crucial catalyst in their journey to feminism.

In these narratives provided by two of my respondents, we see elements or rather a call for what Pease (2010) refers to as “a pedagogy to transform the oppressors and the privileged.” (p. 172). Their stories also mirror some of the things that Schacht and Ewing (2001) identify as crucial for feminist, or as they state pro-feminist, men to consider, including acknowledging their privilege, applying feminist principles in their personal lives and respecting women and women’s spaces.

The Impact of Violence against women

Some of these priorities can also be detected in what Alexander realized when he was still a boy that the women in his environment were most likely to experience violence, i.e. he realized that his mother was more likely to be a victim of sexual violence or abuse than his father. Other respondents discovered this when they

¹⁵ Boy George was lead singer of 1980’s UK pop band Culture Club.

became aware of when a women close to them became victims of sexual violence, including rape and sexual harrassment. Quite a few of my respondents shared stories linked to the discovery of violence in their environment. These examples not only stress the point that Flood and others have made about the centrality of combating VAW is when looking at work aimed towards building gender equality, they also illustrate the importance of these discoveries have for some of these men for making a personal connection to the issue of VAW, which for most of my respondents served as motivations to become politically active on these issues, but also similar to the stories shared in the previous subchapter, become crucial in providing a premise for very personal introspections. Reminding us of what White had to say about the significance of both the political and personal, for the experience of feminist men.

In some cases witnessing how the system and environment reacted negatively or indifferently to these women and what they went through lead to some stark realizations. In a similar vein, but on a bigger scale, the “flood” of personal stories of surviving sexual violence that Bjössi described, leading up to the “Slutwalk” in 2012, had a fundamental effect on Bjössi himself, but he also described how he sensed that more people, men and women, became aware of the prevailance and extent of violence against women. He talked about how being exposed to more stories of women’s experience of gender-based violence, touched him.

Leading up to the Reykjavík Slutwalk this year, suddenly a lot more women started opening up and sharing their stories publicly, but also in private or anonymously. I was involved a bit in organizing the Slutwalk. And it was quite an experience when the floodgates opened up and all these stories came flooding in. After hearing all of these stories one becomes a lot more aware about these things ... This ignited a need to do something, sometimes one needs that.

But as Björn’s story shows, discovering the prevalence of gender-based violence around you, not only sheds light on how close the violence and the victims

are, but also how close the perpetrators are. In fact, hearing all these survivor stories from women, made the fact that men are the perpetrators in most of those cases more evident.

Men that one knows and even some that are friends and acquaintances of mine have been accused of this. I was aware and interested in this issue before, but this has encouraged me to think a lot more about them.

In this context some of the informants talked about how they were affected by a number of sexual violence cases that occurred within some social activist groups. These cases concerned men within these activist groups which sexually harassed or abused female members of that community. Not only was it significant that these were examples that were in close vicinity to my informants in one way or another, but the fact these men, the perpetrators, had been involved in or exposed to feminist principles and activism made the examples even more telling about the complexities of this issue. Some of these cases have led to severe splits within the social activist community in Iceland. Björn talks about how these instances are important in making you think about how many perpetrators one knows.

Experiences and insights like these contributed to the men I talked to to look differently at many things they took for granted or did not put much thought into before being faced with sometimes very harsh realizations. This included not only realizing that women experienced many things that they were exempt from because they were men, but it also led them to look differently at the behaviour of men around them. These stories underline what Flood argued for previously, advance in ending VAW is only possible if more men change the attitudes, identities and interactions that induce or maintain violence.

Interacting with Male culture and Dominant Masculinities

As the discussion above has shown, confronting various aspects of dominant masculinities is quite a personal challenge, or as White has pointed out, it's a process that entails "continuously" becoming (White, 2008, p. 201). In fact, all the informants talked about the importance of going deeper into dissecting aspects of male culture in order to address issues like violence against women. They talked about the need to change the structure of the culture and challenge predominant messages. Gunnar points out:

This culture that we live in, it specializes in what I like to call toxic mimics, rape is a toxic mimic of sexuality. It has the same form but the content is different. It's a question of bringing content to what it means to be sexual and try to focus on that, try to focus on what we should be doing, rather to focus on what we should not be doing.

Einar points out that it is not in people's nature to commit violence; he says that "rape culture" encourages rape and in fact permits it and expects them to occur. Here Einar is echoing the discussion above about looking critically at the oppressing structures that are entailed in masculine cultures (Pease, 2010). He goes on to state: "The violence will not start to decrease until society changes, and totally changes. As long as women are objectified, rapes will continue to occur." He finds that in certain groups of friends or community of men, a certain culture, a certain language is prevalent. He tells of a relative his age:

When he goes out to party on the weekends, he says he is going "hunting". Which is just a way into the violence. He also talks about women as meat, and to "close" them, when you are done with them. He uses a lot of violent language. And how is consent possible in this context?

They all talk about the challenges of manouvering in an environment of mainstream male culture. Gunnar actually says he has very few heterosexual male friends:

Very, very few, I can count them on one hand, because in general when I meet men there is always this period of trying to establish a kind of eye contact. Everyone is wearing his masculine shield. I do that too, when I meet new men and I think we all do. We need to stop doing it. We always have this shield up especially when we meet other men, we are kind of like peeking behind it and we are trying to make eye contact and go like “Can I trust you?” and when the other guy is like ... then we open up and cast the shield aside, but we always have this front.

And Gunnar goes on to say that when faced with sexist behaviour it can be even more challenging at times. In situations where he has been confronted with attitudes and conversations that are offensive, it can be difficult to confront them and the inclination is often to cooperate, but it can also be a point of realization:

One experience where I thought to myself, “Gunnar you need to start living your ideals and not care about what other people think,” came once at work. This one coworker was always really nice to me. At one point there was this girl he was talking to her and he then comes over to me, this guys is like 35 years old, and he comes over to me and starts talking about the girl, and says “Look at her, 15, fucking 15 and she is really nice and tight” and I find my hand going up and slapping his hands, in approval, and he leaves and I feel immediately like cutting off my own hand and feeding it to the lions. I felt it is easier to cooperate then to say something, to take a stance.

Here Gunnar displays what Cornwall et al (2011), amongst others, referes to as “reflexive self-awareness” (p. 13), or even what Armato (2013) calls “rigorous reflexivity” (p. 596-7). Like Gunnar, some of my respondents describe situations where they become very aware of their behaviour and the behaviour of other men around them, and how easy it is to be complicit. Gunnar even goes on to say that being aware is not enough; it is a constant challenge to interact with male culture:

And I think these experiences made me aware that even no matter how much of a feminist you are, you will always be part of this system. The

system will always have to be challenged, because you are always a part of it. And you are kidding yourself if you think you cannot be part of it and think you can be outside of it. It doesn't matter how few male chauvinists you are hanging out with, it doesn't matter how many male feminists you surround yourself with. Because as soon as you are outside of that box, as soon as you are in the minority, you find out how hard it is to do battle and often you find it is just easier to cooperate.

Here it might be useful to look at Gunnar's experience with Larry May's (1998) discussion of the *progressive male standpoint* in mind (p. 337). May suggests four steps in order to achieve this standpoint: attempting to understand personal experience of traditional male behavior; a critical reflection on how said behavior affects women and men; and a moral incentive to attempt to change this kind of behavior. Gunnar in fact displays these elements or steps. But as this example show, it is far from easy to go through these processes. This challenge of interacting with various aspects of male culture and the masculine behavior it often entails might be difficult to avoid, but despite that my respondents did not think that it was impossible to change. Most of them believed that it was possible to change this culture, that it was possible to introduce substantial changes, and maybe as May suggests achieve a *moral reconceptualization of masculinity*. But then the question is how, and is possible to do so, as May also suggests, in way that is convincing to other men?

Making Space for Healthy Masculinities

In the *Men and Development* (2011) volume, Edström et al, (2014) states men are in fact changing, suggesting that it is possible for men to resist "hegemonic forms of masculinity" (p. 2). This can be of course achieved amongst other things by bringing to light the "costs of masculinity" for men. He points out that many initiatives working with men and boys from a gender equality perspective, tread "carefully with

a desire not to ‘turn men off’ or to blame them individually for the injustices and harms of patriarchy” (p. 2), and rather the focus has increasingly become to address and change “cultural or social norms that guide men’s behaviour” (p. 2). In this section my respondents provide examples of how they engage with this and how they in different ways try to affect or change the interactions with men in their environment.

Some of my respondents, like Erik, seemed to have an easier time dismissing the pushback and negative interactions from men who expressed anti-feminist sentiments and attitudes. He believed that feminist need to be ready to confront or take a stand towards anti feminist reactions. Even though some people seem bitter and agitated when feminist issues are raised, he underlined the need to put up a strong front:

One has to put on a poker face, if we want to make good progress in this fight/struggle. We have to swallow our pride and try to stop this annoyance. Otherwise we wont get far. One has to hold its own, never to be lost for words, never to shout or show that you are annoyed. You have to show that you are the better man. One has to ensure levelheaded discussions.

Erik’s perspective is interesting in the way it depicts a very clear way of standing ground against certain male attitudes that he believes need to be confronted, making the point that one has to show that you are the better man. This not only shows a conviction in the perspective he believes in but that could also be read as making a stand for this cause makes you a “better man”, in a way one could say that he explicitly takes the *progressive male standpoint* (May, 1998). At one point he also refers to the importance of trying to contribute to a healthier discussion.

Other respondents highlight in different ways how particular conformist and anti- egalitarian attitudes need to be challenged. Viktor believes that specific and

narrow ideas or even myths about men and what is considered masculine behavior and even masculine nature and sexuality need to be deconstructed. One could say that Erik and Viktor show two aspects in challenging dominant masculinities here. In Erik's case a need to confront the pushback from certain men and masculine attitudes towards feminist challenges to their notions and in Viktor's case, he shows the need of being aware of how masculine stereotypes are limiting, and there is a need to confront them and even look further. At one point Viktor ponders when discussing the messages that surround sexual based violence against women, not only are there things that one would want to tell their daughters, but he says more importantly: "What should I teach my son?"

So how to approach other men or raise the issues can entail different things. In an interesting example of what Edström (2014) and co refer to as approaching men "carefully with a desire not to 'turn men off'" (p. 2). A few of my respondents pointed out an important aspect in identifying and addressing negative aspects of male culture and behavior. They suggest, for example, to look critically at the terminology used in the context of sexual violence. The use of the term "rapists" is for example problematic, and in some cases, like in the ones mentioned above, turned out to be anti-productive. Gunnar and Björn refer to this as the "monstrification" of perpetrators of gender based violence. Björn mentions as an example of this, a radio show discussion that depicted the typical approach in the general discussion on gender based violence:

There were these three guys talking about the events of the merchant holiday weekend. And they talked about these "monsters" that were attending these weekend festivals, which were unstoppable. The debate is still on this level. One has to realize that there are so many examples of gender based violence and the perpetrators are of all types.

Björn talked about how this notion of sexual violence perpetrators and rapists as “monsters”, is not something most men will identify with. Thinking “I am not a monster”, therefore those men that have crossed the line do not see themselves as these “monsters” that are always being depicted. Gunnar says that this labeling can lead men, to not even recognising that they have in fact crossed the line and sexually abused someone. It, in fact, stops the process from going further. Einar says that people in general are not aware how complex an issue gender based violence is, and even in communities, like the social activist groups mentioned above, where feminist discussion had taken place, the need for a deeper understanding became apparent. Björn points out that it is mostly women that are discussing these issues, and amongst themselves. Men are not exposed to these discussions and revelations, and therefore not aware which women around them are survivors of sexual violence. Moreover men are not involved in these discussions with other men either: “We men are never discussing ‘have you abused someone?’” Therefore challenging how sexual violence is discussed and depicted is crucial, as Björn points out that rape culture can’t be changed if “perpetrators are always seen as monsters.”

As shown with a few examples above, my respondents mention a few examples of how they have challenged dominant masculine culture, i.e. dominant attitudes and behaviors, including challenging individual men to discuss some of these things, but also to address certain more systematic things, like how we use and apply certain concepts like “rapist” and so forth. These discussions echo Flood’s argument that the only way to progress in issues like for example VAW, is changing amongst other things, the attitude of men regarding these issues. The example of addressing the issue of “monstrification” is for example an interesting way at not only attempting at changing such attitudes, but also trying to bring in the perspective of

men, that have until now shown to be resistant or reluctant to tackle their role in the culture that perpetuates violence and abuse against women. In the following passages we will take a look at how my respondents have managed through engaging with feminism to address some of the issues that they have encountered.

Men and feminism

As mentioned above, most of my respondents, especially those between the age of 18 and 22, were very positive about the increasing number of young men that identify themselves as feminists. Most of my expert respondents also agreed, however one of the expert respondents pointed out that even despite there maybe seem to be currently more feminist men then before, he argues that they are still a marginal group, amongst men and feminists as well. And Gunnar states that there is still too few in general: “we are still at a point in time where there are not as many men in feminism as there probably should be.” When talking about the role of feminism in their lives, some of my informants talk about the importance of having a circle of men around them that are good at looking inwards and talking about various issues that concern their experiences and masculinities. Interacting and working with other feminist men can provide a unique environment to discuss certain topics and nurture certain behavior. Gunnar goes on to say that “the discussion about masculinity is really, really important and obviously it is difficult to discuss it with someone who is not masculine, or it is a kind of conversation which you can not have with a person who does not walk through the world as a male.”

Even though some of them touch upon the need for having space to talk with men about specific issues, all of them where involved in feminist activities with other

women and as a rule preferred to be in mixed groups. In the context of the discussion in chapter 3, where we discussed the split between pro-feminist and anti-feminist men and groups, it is clear these men not only identify as feminists, they see it as crucial that feminist men work in coalition with feminist women and organizations, as Pease (2010), and Schacht and Ewing (2001) discussed previously amongst others. My respondents are not interested in segregation, and one of my respondents talked about the problems with for example if feminist men would alone be responsible for planning an event for women survivors of sexual violence.

When my informants were asked about their involvement in feminist work, they talked very positively about the experience. They have in almost all cases been very well received and find the environment very engaging and rewarding. Gunnar for example does not make a distinction if he is working with feminist women, men or in mixed groups, but he does point out, as mentioned above, having an opportunity to discuss things with other men has its advantages:

When there are men you talk about the experience of being a male-bodied person, to talk about the privilege you have as a man and talk about the experience you have as a man that is normally not talked about. This is something you can talk about with a person that is male and feminist, which you cannot talk about with other males.

Einar has been involved in various projects focused on men and he shared that there were quite a few things that were unique to working in a group of only male feminists, in comparison to mixed groups:

Like for example, we were not in danger of being threatened with rape, we would not experience various verbal abuse and discourse. No one would state that we are always complaining and whining.

Most of my respondents point out that this is reflected by the fact that there are certain experiences that men do not come to know, it is also important to bear in mind

that feminists men, even though they have many insights into the way that women walk through life, they must be careful not to step over the line, and start telling women how they feel, how they are oppressed or abused, or as Gunnar puts it:

I find it really difficult to tell women what to do, even feminist women or non-feminist women. This, I think is the paradox of being a man and being a feminist. I try to be always really careful with that; you know in what way I am involved. I just know that there is something wrong when a group of guys who are arranging a radical feminist action, which is supposed to benefit survivors of sexual abuse, there is something iffy about it and I can't put my finger on what it is.

Even though they all talk about being well received, they do mention being aware of that their relation to the issues are different from how their female feminist colleagues relate to them. Björn touches on this, by talking about being insecure about the fact that he doesn't always dare to contribute or comment on discussions. In his case he has not studied much in feminist or gender studies, but even though he does not have any qualms about calling himself a feminist, he has pro-feminist friends that are reluctant to call themselves such, because they are not being oppressed, they can never fully understand the experience of women.

The notion of privilege or being privileged is something that all my informants talked about as something they have had to address and struggle with. Gunnar points out that:

I feel like I should be a minority too. But I am not a minority; I am privileged in every sense of the word, apart from being a feminist. But I am really privileged and I can never feel what a minority is feeling. I tried to convince myself at one point that I was bisexual, so that I would have something to fight for, but then realized that I am probably not. I try to, you know the personal is political and nothing is personal to me, it's all theoretical to me. Nothing is personal to the person that is so privileged.

This refers back to the paradox of being a male feminist that Gunnar referred to earlier. This creates various dilemmas and challenges. And he explains that this leads to a form of, you could say, self-imposed exile:

I am privileged, but I am a feminist and I do question masculinity a lot. I want to eradicate it. This is why I don't have a lot of straight male friends. I stay away from that. You try to mingle with your own crowd.

They all refer to a particular kind of privilege, of being a man in feminism. Like Einar spoke of earlier, there are certain things that men can say and do, that female feminists would not get away without being criticized or attacked. Not only are men able to do certain things, they also get a lot of attention for feminist actions they are involved in. This is line with what was discussed in chapter 3, concerning how men benefit from being privileged, as Kimmel it can be like having the wind in your back, but it is also useful to look at Williams use of the term the “glass escalator” (1992), where men benefit from a quicker and higher professional trajectory than women in a women dominated field. Björn describes concerned, how this materialize in the attention men can get:

It is so strange, everywhere where men get involved; it often gets a lot of attention, which I sometimes don't know what to think off. The other year, there was this big campaign in one of the newspapers, where tens of men were writing articles about gender based violence. This action got a lot of attention and goodwill, mostly because men were writing.

Einar points out that there is always a risk that men's involvement can lead to a kind of “token feminism” or end up being superficial, like in the example of the social activists discussed earlier. This was also was discussed in chapter 3, when Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) pointed out how initiatives, in e.g. developmental work, can end up being “superficial” and end up being catered to men, to attract more men to the issue, with not addressing certain “sensitive” issues

(Cornwall et al, 2011). This can lead to the development and implementation of programs and actions that many authors feel lack the progressive edge, that is needed in order to achieve tangible change in gender relations. Some of my respondents also pointed out, that this could also lead to feminism becoming more masculinized, and one could propose that would lead to men's participation would loose, borrowing from Cornwalls et al (2011), their "reflexive self-awareness," (p. 13) which would put the accountability of those initiatives into doubt.

With this in mind, Einar also hopes that when men do become more active that feminism will evolve into something more then it is now, that would include men and masculinities in a more inclusive way. However as all my respondents addressed in one way or another, it is important to be ware of the limitations and challenges of men's increased participation in feminist activism and debates. In the following section we will shed light on few of the challenges and limitations that my respondents discussed.

Challenges and Limitations

In the previous section, my respondents expressed a sincere and measured believe in the idea that things are moving forward, and there is reason to be optimistic. However most of the respondents expressed a need to be aware of the possible risks, challenges and even limitations of increased participation of men in feminism and their engagement in working towards increased gender equality and social justice.

This is also something that came to mind when I was doing my participatory observation at the Reykjavík "Slutwalk" last summer (2013). There was a clear male presence, and their were men participating in the walk in various ways, some

contributed to the organization of the event, others held up posters with slogans, and others seemed to be there with their female friends or girlfriends/partners. However during the final part of the agenda, during a concert performance by a young male rap artist, I observed a group of men who had been part of the crowd for most of the event, at one point getting into a verbal confrontation with a group of young women who were holding posters with various feminist and anti gender based violence slogans. In short the interaction led to one of the young men claiming that these women, with the feminist slogans, were too extreme, and that they had accused him of being an abuser.

This made me think of the various drawbacks of an event such as this one, that at the same time, the campaign was claiming to working from a radical feminist perspective, it was also attempting to engage a broad crowd, encouraging all men to get involved in the fight against gender based violence. This made me think about the downsides that this approach entails. My respondents addressed some of these issues and I suggest they could be categorized in three different ways or into three different groups of positions or standpoints.

Firstly, I would mention the position that is held by men who express a true conviction for the feminist cause, but are aware or become aware of their own limitations. This is, for example expressed by Georg when I ask him how he defines himself. Even though he finds that this discussion has not been very dominant lately in the Icelandic context, he finds it important to be careful in proclaiming himself a feminist, in order to show respect, if that would not correspond how some female feminists would view that claim. Georg seems to be shy about proclaiming to be a feminist, not because he does not believe in the importance of feminist politics, but rather that he believes that his stance and presence in the feminist project is not

without its problems. This is line with how many men in the U.S. and U.K. for example identify as pro-feminist, in a show of respect for feminist women and their standpoint (e.g. Hearn, 2008). One problem he expressed is the fact that it should not be ignored that men entering feminist spaces, organizations, discussions or political actions, lead to them taking up space where women feminists are currently. Georg also stresses the importance of being aware of the limitations of ones own ideas. Adam points out that the presence of men always has an effect on the context, some good and some bad.

Hans also points out that by becoming active in feminist activism, one of the biggest challenges has been discovering his own limitations and how easy it is to reproduce the behavior that he is trying to challenge. He mentions the simple example of him attending feminist meetings, and making sure that he doesn't leave the dishwashing and clearing up to the women in the group. In that context he expressed the following: "It is important to be aware of ones own flaws and limitations, and not to be the oppressor one is trying to fight against." This comes back to when Gunnar and Einar talked about the importance of being aware of your own privilege and the behavior that can result from it.

The second position also relates to men's relation to privilege. This position however entails some men, who define themselves as feminists, are not always aware of their privilege in many or all contexts, but rather they deny or are blind to their own privilege, in addition to not acknowledging sexist and abusive behavior towards women. This position came up in the examples that a few of the men mentioned above, involving incidents of sexual abuse in activist circles, which led to splits in some organizations, because like some of my respondents described, some of the proclaimed feminists, were in fact not feminists and did not acknowledge that their

behavior had been abusive. This issue is also related to when Björn talked earlier about his realization of the possibility of perpetrators to be amongst men he know, a realization that had a very profound effect on him. This is also an issue that came up during my study, i.e. the possibility of some of the informants being perpetrators. It is hard to see if that is something that can be fully avoided, when a study like this entails gathering and looking at what they say, but not what they do.

The third position is related to the previous one but is distinct in some crucial ways. This standpoint includes men who use feminism as an alibi, to what my respondents described as not only non-feminist behavior, but just plain sexism and misogyny. Georg describes an example of this, a very popular rap artist in Iceland, named Blaz Roca:

I remember an interview with him last winter, where he stated that he was a feminist, but he used it to excuse everything else, instead of taking responsibility for it. So by saying “I am a feminist,” therefore I don’t need to take responsibility for my lyrics and my words. And he says, since I am a feminist, this can’t be anti-feminist.

Therefore my respondents believed that these examples and others show how complex the participation of men can be. As Georg stated at some point, it won’t necessarily lead to what we want and wont be without its problems and challenges. That includes the issue of the men that appear, are not always they way we want them to be, however that is.

My respondents did not identify any specific ways to address these particular issues, but they mention several things that they find are key or useful in achieving a wider social change and change in male culture. We will take a look at some of those in the following section.

Social change and Changing men

A few of my informants see social change as the premise of all their social activism, and some have been active in various political movements and anarchist movements as well. They see feminist actions as part of a bigger social change project, albeit a crucial foundation to social change, stating, in fact that “feminism practices what anarchism preaches.” In line with what several authors discussed in chapter 3, including Cornwall and Edström, almost all my respondents emphasized that in order to achieve any substantial change in attitudes there is a need to address the structure of society. As Björn pointed out, there are already substantial differences in attitudes between generations:

One of course knows men, like my father, and they have just received a very different upbringing. I know that this will change with my generation and a totally different vision will emerge. There seems to be a positive development, with backlashes always once in a while, which I hope will become less and less.

Einar points out that he read an article recently by an Icelandic woman, who shared the notion that maybe women have done what they can at this point and now its men’s turn to contribute to what is needed, which aligns for example with the call for engaging men, that has been building momentum since the Beijing Platform was published in 1995 and received a significant public profile upgrade in the recent UN Women campaign *HeForShe*, launched September 2014. Björn sincerely believes that men’s participation has its benefits; it does get attention and can raise more awareness on the issue. Einar sees the benefits mostly in the fact that feminist men can potentially appeal better to other men, in a way that feminist women would not necessarily do, and especially the younger generation of men and boys.

As mentioned a few times, and also echoing Flood (2011a), violence against women is a central issue for all my respondents. They all identified, some explicitly,

feminism as crucial in the fight against gender-based violence. Einar believes that violence against women cannot be properly addressed without feminism: “Only feminists are the ones doing something good on this issue.” All of my informants talked about positive developments in combating violence against women and were somewhat optimistic that there would be a substantial shift in attitudes. Most of the informants had a clear idea what were the next steps in order to move forward. Gunnar for example explains that after years of campaigns that focused on “No means No” and “Men say No to Rape”, the latter was a campaign implemented by the Feminist Association in the mid 00’s mentioned above (discussed in chapter 2), implying that things have in some ways improved, it is important to take the next step: “I think we have reached the point where all guys will say rape is bad, but from there to get men to stop raping, is really difficult.”

Previously in this chapter and in chapter 3 we referred to Flood (2011a) and how he stresses the importance of changing the attitudes and behavior of men, focusing on consent, respect and gender equality in order to more effectively advance in combating violence against women (p. 372). The sentiments Flood mentions are very much reflected in what quite a few of my respondents refer to as key in progressing in combating violence against women, especially the issue of consent. For the last few years, a few of my respondents have been involved in actions that focus on consent:

It is not enough to say that rape is bad and that no means no, because one thing is to say that rape is bad, but if you don’t know what consent means. So we need to start a debate on what is consent. (Gunnar)

In line with how some authors (Connell, Edström and Flood, to name just a few) have pointed out the importance of developing ways to change the behavior and culture of behavior amongst men, Gunnar explains how they realized that they should

be focusing on what boys and men should be doing and “trying to put myself into the shoes of 10 year old boys who start to watch porn, they don’t know any better.” He believes it is not enough to preach this, people have to be given an incentive, like “your sexual life with women as a man will be better if you follow these simple ground rules of consent, of always asking first.” They find that there is a real need to go to another level and start a constructive discussion on what consent means and what it means to cross boundaries and “educate how sexy communications is.” Communication is something that Einar finds to be at the core of the issue. For him it is crucial to go deep into the issue in order to address it effectively.

All of my respondents believe that there are real opportunities in moving forward on issue like violence against women. Einar says that people are fed up and want real change. There is real momentum with different actions working together. Björn says that he hopes this positive flood that he has been sensing, is just beginning. He admits many things are still in their beginning phases. Despite this optimism Einar still finds it important to show caution, he says he would never claim that gender based violence is on the decrease. That is still inconceivable, the roots or the patterns run so deep. He goes on to say: “But I still believe very strongly that we can have a very substantial and important impact on the culture ... maybe one day. “

In this section we have heard the men talk about the possibility of achieving actual social change and gender justice through engaging men. But how to achieve that, how to spread out different attitudes and behavior? In the next section we will look at the role of education to this end.

Achieving Change through Education

In chapter two, I refer to Barker et al (2011) who analyze the work of the *Promundo* organization, which advocates for a space addressing the issues of men and masculinities in public policies - to that end, they promote a concept of “gender literacy.” (p. 283) Promoting a new literacy aligns with the stated need for education that aims to achieve a change in attitudes (including Connell, 2005b and Flood, 2011a). All my respondents talk about the importance of education in order to move forward. In fact, quite a few of my respondents, like Viktor previously, talk about the importance of being exposed to feminism, education about gender based violence, and gender studies as a crucial part of the forming of their feminist attitudes and outlooks. One of my expert respondents pointed out that the professors at the Gender Studies Department at the University of Iceland have noticed a difference in the attitudes and knowledge of the students who have been exposed to gender studies and feminism in high school courses. Some of my respondents talk explicitly about the importance of being exposed to feminist agenda in their youth, as well as being around male role models who teach gender studies in high schools. Björn, for example, admits based on his own experience as a teenager, that he would have welcomed this kind of education:

When I think about it now, it would have been good for me; I would probably have started calling myself a feminist even earlier. If I would have some information, and also gotten some sexual education, especially in elementary school. This is something that is slowly starting to change now.

My respondents who have worked on prevention campaigns and education programs, find it crucial to go into schools and educate young men about gender equality, consent, and communication. As one of my respondents put it, it was important “to help young people become adults.” They identified this as something that can be built

on, and lead to further possibilities. One example is a co-operation project between several ministries (including the Ministry of Education) and a few grassroots movements that has led to a comprehensive education program that started in 2013. This included, for example, the production of a sexual education documentary called “Get a Yes” (Icelandic: Fáðu Já), which focuses on communication and consent. This documentary was, in the school year of 2013-2014, shown to every 10th grade class (aged 15-16). A recent survey revealed that the attitudes of the students, especially of the boys, had changed in a very positive direction. As mentioned in a section above, there has been an increase in elective courses in high schools with the focus on gender and feminist studies, and in the last few years a few municipalities, like Reykjavík, have been developing programs and strategies to improve the gender sensitivity of the curriculum and teaching approaches. This is in addition to all the feminist associations that have been formed by high school students.

These efforts are in the beginning stages, and it is therefore premature to assume that they constitute proof of any substantial changes, and if they will lead to more permanent changes in attitudes. But more and more optimistic voices do believe that a long-term approach will yield positive results. All of my respondents stressed that this process would take time, but saw it as something very feasible. Or, as one of my respondents (Jakob) put it, similar extensive policy projects have been done before. He mentions the anti smoking legislation in the 1990’s, which included an extensive education component, had an impressive effect on the number of young smokers. Another important factor in all this, which has been mentioned above, is the Internet and the education potential it has. Erik, for example, pointed out that not only is the internet something that everyone uses, and where you can also find the whole spectrum of well informed and misinformed attitudes about most things, but he

believes it is one of the most important venues to work with, and to spread constructive and educational information. It is also a space that works very fast, and therefore can contribute to a swifter change.

“Something in the Air”

As portrayed above in the opinions and perspectives expressed by my respondents, there is a general optimistic sentiment regarding the state of feminist activism in Iceland, and the potential that an increased participation of men might entail. In fact, one could say that many believe that there is “something in the air”, that there is good reason to be optimistic and that there are opportunities in the current atmosphere that entail possibilities towards actual social change and a more gender equitable society. No one that I talked with is claiming that everything is now in the bag, everyone raises concerns or rather flags the importance of being aware of the downsides, dangers and the challenges that engaging men with feminism and the project for gender justice can entail. In addition, it is clear from the narratives of these men, that the road to feminism and more equalitarian attitudes is not a simple and straight avenue. If you consider the stories the men shared, it took all of the men years and several detours to arrive at feminism. In addition, as some of the stories showcased might reflect, living with feminism, as a male feminist, is also not a simple journey. It includes a lot of navigations, negotiations, retrospective soul-searching, and regularly cleaning out the closet.

To reiterate Flood’s (2011a) words: “some men are part of the problem, all men are part of the solution.” (p. 372). This definitely is a sentiment shared with most of the informants. There was, of course, a difference in insights on what needed to be

done, but most of them agreed that a radical and long-term approach was needed. Not only was education needed, they argued for integrating feminism and gender equality principles into the education system. Some argued, the younger - the better, as one respondent put it, “in order to inoculate them, to prepare them before they get older,” in order to have the tools to process and resist hegemonic ideas about gender relations and masculinity. As mentioned before, even though most of my respondents were positive about the possibility to engage in substantial change, the younger of my respondents were even more optimistic and believed that there was now an opportunity to capture this wave, or fashion trend, to mobilize young men and women for social change. Quite a few referred to the Reykjavík Gay Pride Parade¹⁶, which started in 2000 (the festival first took place in 1999), and has become the biggest public event in Iceland, with an estimated 100.000 people attending in August 2014 (population of Iceland is 330.000). They referred to the parade as an example of how a public action can lead to substantial change in attitudes, which they believed was also positive for more egalitarian and progressive attitudes in general. A few of them pointed out, the path had been made or even cleared by previous historical and recent movements and actions and was just a matter of grabbing the opportunity. Some of them pointed out that since Iceland has a small population and the lines of communication were short, many things were possible. In addition, one of my respondents remarked, unlike in some other European countries he had lived in, the feminist movement never stopped in Iceland.

¹⁶ <http://www.reykjavikpride.com/>

In closing

In this chapter I presented the main findings of the analysis of the interviews I conducted with fifteen young feminist men in Iceland. As evident to the themes discussed in the chapter, a diverse array of topics transpired through the analysis, and as I mentioned in the introduction, there was no way to address all of the interesting elements that my respondents touched upon. But with the selection of themes and the setup of the chapter, I tried to piece together a narrative that captures the voices and the stories of these young men, representing their stories as well as possible, while attempting to engage with them analytically in light of some of the theoretical frameworks I covered in the third chapter.

The themes covered in this chapter shed light on the recent development of feminist discourse and actions, including the gender equality debate in Iceland. The focus was, of course, first and foremost on how these young men experienced the current situation and what for them stood out in the current debate. Through their stories we found about how feminism seems to be more popular, almost in fashion, and that there is more space to engage in feminist debate and actions. They also claimed that there were more men involved in feminism and the space for them to not only identify as feminist, but to engage publicly in feminist discourse and activism, had grown. It became clear that activism and debate about violence against women were central to these developments, and everyone highlighted the importance of that issue both for general public, and for them personally. An important part of their stories was how their political stance as feminists and their personal experience being a feminist came together. Not only were these elements both an important part of their experience, but also these two sides were constantly interacting and complicating each other. As White discussed in the third chapter, being a feminist man is a unique

experience of both the political and the personal, which entails a process of constantly becoming. For these men, becoming a feminist was not just like switching on a switch. For them, being a feminist entailed various challenges, including recognizing and acknowledging their privilege and other traditional masculine behaviors. Interacting with dominant male culture could entail tricky interactions for many of my respondents, which reminded them of the differences between how they go through life, compared to many women in their surroundings. In addition to all this they all shared optimism about the future of feminist discourse in Iceland. They believed not only that there were currently more men involved, but also that there were opportunities to instigate change amongst men in order to create a more egalitarian society and more progressive hegemonic masculinities.

In order to shed light more light on the implications of these findings, I will provide a more analytical and theoretical engagement with the main themes in the conclusion chapter.

VI. Conclusions

This study has been conducted with the objective to provide insights into the experiences of young Icelandic feminist men. I have been working with several questions, including: What can the experiences of Icelandic pro-feminist men tell us about how they conceptualize their own masculinities and how do they interact with dominant masculinities? And how can the experiences be conceptualized in such a way as to challenge the paradigm of dominant masculinities; and how can the lessons learned be articulated in order to inform conceptual frameworks of social change? In addition a number of questions have emerged during the realization of this study, including: Is it possible to claim that there is currently a shift or a turn taking place in feminist activism and debate in Iceland, which includes an increased participation of men? Does the increased number of men identifying themselves as feminist, entail a shift in paradigm, an actual change? To what can we ascribe the seemingly increased participation of men in feminist activities and debates? Can the wider, societal reasons for these developments be identified? What can we learn from the increased participation of men in Iceland? In this concluding chapter I will address the main findings of my study: the political versus the personal dynamics as experienced by my informants; the new optimism; the role of social media in mobilizing public support; feminist men as catalysts in peer education and new pedagogy; proximity to violence and perpetrators of violence; a set of actions applied in communication that I dub as “negotiations” and *hipster* culture as a vehicle for progressive and equitable attitudes.

When thinking about how feminist men, as Kimmel puts it, “do” feminism, the pairing of “the political” and “the personal” is very central to their experience, as it is for feminist women. It is a useful way to look at the dynamics of being a feminist

man. I will highlight the political and personal aspects that characterize the experiences of this group of men and outline how these two spheres interact with each other.

As the findings show, a new optimism has emerged about the participation of men in feminist discourse and activism. Not only is there a broader space for feminism, there is also more space for men to engage in feminist debates and gender equality actions. Even though there is still need for more men to get involved in these issues, currently there is an opportunity to engage more men in a feminist project of changing hegemonic masculinities, that would lead to the creation of a more egalitarian male culture and improved gender relations. The notion is not that “we are almost there”, but rather that now there is a path, which has been made possible through the struggles taken on by women’s rights and feminist movements through history. There is now a possibility to engage in a contextually and substantially different way.

To use this opportunity and optimism, two areas or approaches have been highlighted. Both of them are already playing a significant role in creating a space for feminist debate and for disseminating information and ideas. These are on one hand, the Internet and social media, and on the other hand education. The Internet was identified as having a key role in creating the new space for feminism and social activism in general. Even though it is also the arena of aggressive anti-feminist, misogynist, racist and homophobic (to name a few) sentiments, it is also the space where it is very easy to disseminate information that is conducive to a more engaged and progressive debate. The Internet and more specifically social media provide a medium for sharing local and global developments and debates. The global and transnational nature of the Internet ensures that not only does information travel

to Iceland from all over the world, but certain developments in Iceland are carried all over the world as well. Social media has made it possible to react to certain issues or disseminate developments or information very quickly and efficiently.

The role of education, in its many forms and guises, was underlined repeatedly in this study. Education played a key role in exposing the men in this study to feminism and new ways of thinking about gender relations and masculinities, leading to more progressive attitudes and viewpoints. More importantly the study shows the importance of introducing feminist ideals into the formal education system and policies, as crucial building blocks for a more gender equitable culture. The argument being, that the sooner young boys and girls are exposed to these ideals, and a more critical way of thinking, the more capable young people would be to interact critically with traditional culture and messages.

When looking at the personal component of the experience of feminist men, there are of course many things to consider. As White and other authors have discussed previously, the experience of feminist men entails many personal, emotional and social interaction challenges. Taking a feminist stand, requires having to encounter and deal with many complex issues, including for example: the privilege of being a man; the sexism and misogyny encroached in male culture; the differences in how men experience many daily activities compared to women; and the fact that men experience sexual violence, abuse or assault to a far lesser degree than women do. Discovering and realizing the extent of these differences, can lead to very challenging emotional experiences. This can result in complex interactions and in some cases negotiations, i.e. feminist men in many cases decide how to approach or engage on a case-to-case basis. This could include for example: facing challenges head on; assessing the audience; “picking their fights wisely,” not telling everyone at

every occasion that they are feminists, or deciding not to call someone's sexist behavior out, and so forth. Related to the tendency or strategy to negotiate their identity and approaches was the importance of having a group of like-minded friends, a safe space or, if you will, a "bubble", where it was easy to express views openly and without confrontation.

With the above in mind, I argue that the strategy of negotiation leads to an unstable identity. The strategy of negotiations leads to a state of belonging and not belonging. Meaning feminist men face various negative aspects of hegemonic masculine behavior on a daily basis, while still benefitting from for being men, and on one hand they have to decide if they want to challenge it or not. Another aspect of this that can entail a complex experience and reaction for these men, is when they discover not only the extent of day to day sexism and inequality, but also the possibility and in many cases the reality of there being perpetrators of sexual violence, abuse or assault, in their midst, amongst friends or acquaintances. This vicinity or rather discovery of the proximity of violent or abusive men, can be a difficult fact to process, as was evident for me as a researcher conducting this study.

This brings me to how one could say the political and personal meet. In previous chapters, there was a discussion of creating and enabling a more progressive masculinity which could more easily handle and balance the two components, the political and the personal. In line with the discussion above about the opportunities in using education in instigating a gender equal social justice, I suggest that there is in fact a space, in the current Icelandic context, for a *new pedagogy*, which would entail a gender literacy that would enable the possibility of changing hegemonic masculinities.

With that in mind I argue that my research confirms specific aspects of the research done under the conceptual framework of *hybrid masculinity*. The fact that feminism seems to be in “fashion” and that it finds fertile ground in *hipster* culture described above, shows how current hegemonic culture and masculinities adapts to challenges to its domination, by adapting characteristics of subordinate masculinities and more gender equitable, even feminist, ideals. This not only confirms the adaptability of hegemonic masculinities, but also suggests that there is an actual opportunity for progressive social change. In light of the new optimism and in combination with the more accepting, tolerant, equitable and attitudes that are more progressive, one could suggest that, with the approaches stated above, now is the time. The abovementioned optimism needs to be tempered with reservations and with the history of men’s involvement in historical feminist movements in mind; one needs to tread carefully and with caution. The discussions above suggest the urgent need for strategies that would attempt to preempt, not prevent, failures and challenges. Paraphrasing Flood (2011a), who was referring to work related to combating violence against women, not only does the work on these issues need to be expanded, I argue that this can be done and all men can be a part of the solution.

Appendices

Questions – Young Men

Lets start with some background questions.

Introduction/Definitions

1. What to do you is gender equality?
2. In the context of gender equality issues, how would you define yourself?
 - a. Feminist, pro-feminist, supporter...
 - b. Why?
3. What is in your mind the role of men in gender equality issues, in achieving gender equality/justice?
4. What meaning do the past/previous movements/waves have for you?

Your Participation

5. How do you show your commitment?
6. Can you briefly tell me when, how and where you started to be involved in gender or feminist issues?
 - a. Was there something specific that got you to be involved? Something that inspired you?
7. What is a priority to you when we talk about gender equality?
8. What has been the composition of formal and informal groups you have been involved with?
 - a. Mostly women, men, mixed?
 - b. Other characteristics, class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation

Your Experience

9. What has this engagement meant for you personally?
 - a. Positives
 - b. Challenges
10. How have you been received in this work?
 - a. Positive or negative

- b. How have men and women respectively related to you?
- 11. How have others responded to your engagement?
 - a. People that are in general not involved in these issues: peers, friends, family, colleagues ...
 - b. How do you explain in it to them?
- 12. The importance/meaning of this work or involvement?

Final Questions

- 13. How do we engage more men in these issues?
- 14. How do you envision the future, concerning this issue?
 - a. Is it different from the past and what we have now?
- 15. Is there something specific about the Icelandic context that makes easier, or even more difficult to declare oneself a feminist?
- 16. Anything you would like to add?

Thank again so much for your time and sharing your thoughts.

Would it be all right if I would be in touch again, maybe by email, to ask you for clarification on some things?

Questions – Experts

- 1. From your perspective, how has the participation of men in feminism/ etc, developed in Iceland, through the years?
- 2. What have been the main characteristics of this development?
- 3. Is there a difference between generations?
- 4. What effect have initiatives like the men's committees had on the development?
- 5. What are the characteristics in the current situation?
- 6. Is it easier for men to get involved currently? And proclaim themselves feminist, etc?

7. Does the participation of men have a role or significance?
8. Has increased engagement had an effect on Icelandic masculinities?
9. How do we get more men involved?
10. How we get more men to face their privileges, etc?
11. Is there something in the Icelandic context?
12. How do you see gender issues and feminist debate develop?

Anything to add.

Thank you again.

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