

Feminist Men and Sexual Behavior: Analyses of Men's Sex with Women

Men and Masculinities

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Abstract

Men's identification with and support for feminism has attracted the interest of masculinity scholars. This study explores an under-researched dimension of this phenomenon, investigating the relationship between feminist identification and sexual behavior. In heterosexual encounters, do feminist men report having sex more recently than those who do not call themselves feminists? During sexual encounters, do feminist men behave differently than non-feminists? In particular, do feminist men organize their sexual behavior in a way that prioritizes their partners' sexual pleasure to a greater extent than non-feminists? Using representative survey data of Canadian adults, we examine the self-reported sexual behavior of heterosexual Canadian men. We find that self-identifying feminist men report having sex more recently and are more likely to report engaging in breast stimulation and performing oral sex on their partners than non-feminists. We discuss the implications of these findings on the sociological literature on gender and sexuality.

Keywords

masculinity, feminism, sexuality, sexual behavior, Canada

Feminism is an important vehicle of social change, operating as an ideology, a social movement, and an identity. Famously, feminism is both personal and political (Hanisch 1969), encouraging us to participate in the reduction of gender inequalities

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in the social world, but also in ourselves and in our personal relationships. Feminism is important for reworking inequitable gender paradigms, at the forefront of progressive change for women's reproductive rights, domestic violence awareness, and combating women's sexual objectification (Ferree and Hess 2016). Feminism is also an avenue of equitable social change encompassing diverse gender and sexual dynamics. Yet recent research shows the persistence of sexual inequality, including in the experience of men's and women's orgasms (Andrejek and Fetner 2019; Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012). In this study, we focus on an understudied aspect of feminist sexuality by examining the extent to which feminist identification is associated with certain sexual behaviors.

Feminism is historically opposed to traditional conceptions of masculinity. Traditional masculinities have been positioned in opposition to femininity, emphasizing independence and interpersonal dominance, as well as an opposition to gender equality and feminism (Connell 2005). However, a growing number of studies show that masculinity is no longer exclusively defined by distance from femininity and the championing of hegemonic norms. These include the *soft-boiled* masculinities of Christian fathers (Heath 2003) and hybrid masculinities that combine aspects of masculinity and femininity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). With this multiplicity of masculinities, including men's support for feminist values and claiming a feminist identity, scholars emphasize the importance of examining the implications of an increasing embrace of gender equality among men (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Bridges 2014; Diefendorf 2019).

Gender ideology is central to many aspects of heterosexual relationships, including in the division of household chores, childcare, and household decision-making (Carlson, Hanson, and Fitzroy 2016; Dernberger and Pepin 2020; Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp 2013). Lamont (2014) shows us that the role of gender ideology begins early in relationships, affecting dating practices. Gender-egalitarian forms of masculinity also affect men's understandings of their own roles in their romantic relationships, but they do not necessarily fully undermine the unspoken gender inequalities that are taken for granted in heterosexual relationships (Lamont 2014). Some scholars, however, question whether men's adoption of feminist identities and proclamations of support for gender equality are genuine, asking whether they are just acts to maintain gender inequality under a different guise (Bridges 2014; Messner 1993; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). This study extends our understandings of feminist-identified men's approaches to their relationships with women by examining the realm of sexual behavior. Specifically, we ask the following: (a) do heterosexual men who adopt a feminist identity report having sex with women more or less than men who do not identify as a feminist? (b) Are heterosexual men who call themselves feminists more likely than other men to report engaging in the types of sexual behavior that emphasize women's sexual pleasure?

To answer these questions, we analyze a subset of data from the 2018 Sex in Canada survey—a demographically representative sample of Canadians. Using ordinal and logistic regression, we find differences in reported sexual behaviors between

heterosexual feminist and non-feminist men, as well as in a third group that is “not sure” if they are feminist. Our analysis of the performance of masculinity in sexual encounters showcases the association of identity on performative male behavior. The findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we address the need to expand the study of masculinities to other fields, specifically sexualities, as identified by other researchers (see Bridges 2019). Second, we analyze variation of masculinities performed within heterosexual relationships, offering insights into the gender dynamics of heterosexuality. Third, our analysis of representative survey data serves as a complement to qualitative approaches to masculinities research, in that it is inclusive of the full diversity of the population of Canadian men.

Performance of Masculinity

Much scholarship on masculinities concerns itself with how men construct and signify a masculine self. Most research on the performance of masculinity focuses largely on activity in the public sphere, in the presence of other men (Bird 1996); and in diverse contexts such as in schools (Pascoe 2007), sports (Messner 1990), the workplace (Prokos and Padavic 2002), and across cultures (Moussawi 2016). In many cases the pursuit of masculinity is harmful to both men and others—especially women and non-heterosexual people (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Reaching back decades, feminist men have been stigmatized as less attractive, less masculine, more feminine, and more likely to be gay (Twenge and Zucker 1999; Wiley et al. 2012). Consequently, many men distance themselves from a feminist identity (Wiley et al. 2012). However, traditional conceptions of masculinity are beginning to shift with enhanced pressure and advocacy for social equality—in particular, the fight for equity for LGBTQ+ and women’s rights (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Messner 1993, 1997). Many men, those of middle and upper classes in particular, increasingly aspire toward non-misogynistic, egalitarian identities (Lamont 2015). As such, more men are supporting feminism, however, some are concerned these men do so for self-motivated reasons (Kretschmer and Barber 2016). Scholarship is responding by focusing on transformations in masculinities. A growing body of literature documents not only the reduction of explicitly homophobic, sexist, and other oppressive masculine traits (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) but also how these masculinities are crafted through behaviors and interactions and in diverse settings (Barber 2016; Oselin and Barber 2016). Notably, *hybrid masculinities* and related theories argue that previously subordinated and marginalized masculinities are being incorporated into privileged male identities, preserving rather than combatting patriarchy and sexism (Arxer 2001; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Heath 2003; Messner 1993).

There is ample empirical research to question the degree to which progressive developments represent a genuine reconfiguration of sexual and gender oppression, a shift of “more style than substance” (Messner 1993: 724). For instance, in Lamont’s (2015) study of college-educated men, she finds the men in her sample

often profess egalitarianism to signify as progressive, classed, and positioned above average, working-class men in public settings. However, within their private romantic relationships there are contradictions, as significant inequalities persist. In other words, public displays of egalitarianism may mask domineering behaviors in private settings. Examining a public setting, Pascoe and Hollander (2016) argue chants of “no means no” by NCAA football players, directed at an opposing player accused of rape, reinforce men’s dominance. Specifically, these men use a feminist slogan to label the accused a failed man, undermining his ability to have consensual sex with women while asserting their dominance over him. Brodyn and Ghaziani’s (2018) concept of *performative progressiveness* draws attention to the dissonance between progressive attitudes and actions whereby pro-LGBT proclamations hypocritically accompany homonegative actions. Within the Canadian context, Stick (forthcoming) finds conflicts between Canadian male athletes’ reported beliefs and behaviors, suggesting that social norms are tempering discrimination based on gender, race, and sexual orientation despite persistence of racist, sexist, and homophobic beliefs.

While contemporary masculinities may be shifting toward progressiveness, interactional and interpersonal dynamics may operate to maintain oppressiveness (Diefendorf and Bridges 2020). The studies discussed earlier suggest that support for feminism and claims of a feminist identity may have little influence on men’s behavior. These studies offer cautions to researchers to avoid making overly broad claims of substantive transformations in masculinity toward sexual and gender equality. There is a need for further research to examine how contemporary transformations in masculinity permeate gender relationships, especially in the private sphere. While it is reasonable to expect that expressions of masculinity would align with behaviors in the public sphere such as in dating practices and division of housework, it is important to test this association (or the lack thereof) directly, and ideally with multiple measures of sexual activity. Below, we interrogate the association between feminist claims among men and two aspects of their sexual relations with women: how recently they participated in various sexual activities and the types of behavior they engaged in during their last sexual encounter, while controlling for demographic characteristics.

Masculinity and Sexuality

Sexual behavior is central to the construction of masculinity, with masculinity effectuated through the control of women’s bodies in intercourse and sexual conquest (Bird 1996; Grazian 2007; Hyde et al. 2009). Gender ideologies and attitudes can manifest in unequal sexual encounters where men’s pleasure is prioritized, and women’s pleasure is considered secondary (Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips 2003; Hayfield and Clarke 2012). In much heterosex, this is supported by traditional sexual scripts and hegemonic masculine norms that place the penis as the focus and male ejaculation the signifier of the end of a sexual event (Thomas, Stelzl, and LaFrance 2017).

With women's pleasure marginalized and subordinated to men's, studies show women are less likely than men to have an orgasm in heterosexual. This gap is widest in casual sexual encounters, whereas women have orgasms more commonly when having sex with partners in relationships (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012). Some contend that the disparity is largely a result of sexual practice. Women are more likely to have an orgasm by manual or oral clitoral stimulation than by vaginal penetration (Herbenick et al. 2018; Salisbury and Fisher 2014; Wade, Kremer, and Brown 2005), and are more sexually satisfied when sexual encounters involve receiving oral sex (Frederick et al. 2018; Richters, de Visser, and Smith. 2006)—when the penis is not the focal point. Research consistently finds the gender gap in orgasms attributable to partners' failures to engage in particular sex acts—most importantly, clitoral stimulation through oral sex (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012). Andrejek and Fetner (2019) argue that the prioritization of men's orgasm encapsulates the expression of inequitable macro gender hierarchies into intimate interactions.

Masculinities scholarship has much to gain by extending and consolidating into other fields such as sexualities (Bridges 2019). While there are debates about the meanings of sexual behavior and their ramifications in the gender power dynamic, few studies examine variation among men in their expressions of masculinity within sexual encounters. Men's identification with feminism, in particular, contrasts with traditional hegemonic norms as it coincides with the desire to end sexism, gendered exploitation and oppression (hooks 2014). Furthermore, as feminist values include advocating for women's sexual liberation, men identifying as feminists may evidence a greater concern for a partner's sexual satisfaction than non-feminist men (Silver, Chadwick, and van Anders 2019). We test whether there is indeed an association between feminist identity among men and the recency of engagement in acts that prioritize women's sexual pleasure when compared against non-feminist men.

Considering the debate surrounding the legitimacy of recent shifts in masculine identities, masculinities researchers need to find new ways to explore their translation into transformation of gender power dynamics. An examination of the intimacy of interpersonal relations can reveal the operation of discreet gender power relations. Danube, Vescio, and Davis (2014) note that men may interact with others differently in homosocial situations compared to when they are alone with women sexual partners. There may also be differences between public and private masculinities (Forrest 2010; Montemurro and Riegman-Murphy 2019). In other words, it is argued that masculinities are renegotiated and challenged in private lives. Intimate, private heterosexual relationships are a primary site where this can occur (Doull et al. 2013).

In this paper, we examine associations between feminist identity and reported sexual behavior. Our aim is to explore the extent to which heterosexual, self-identified feminist men prioritize women's pleasure in sexual encounters, and whether their sexual behaviors differ from those of non-feminist men. We test professed feminist identification with gender parity through an examination of reported acts behind closed doors in the privacy of the bedroom. This is a unique

approach to explore correspondence between identity and action as evidence of genuine progressiveness, with implications for women in sexual encounters and relationships.

Data and Methods

To meet our objectives, we analyze original survey data from the Sex in Canada research project. The Sex in Canada online survey was administered in 2018 in partnership with Environics Research, who recruited a sample of participants from a pool of over 400,000 Canadian adults (ages 19+), including an oversample of LGB-identifying participants (Fetner et al. 2020). The sample is proportionate to the Canadian population as of the most recent census with regard to gender, age group, racial visible minority status, primary language (English or French), highest level of education, and region of residence (N=2,303). The present study analyzes a subset of self-identified heterosexual men (n=958), comprising 42% of the sample. The survey instrument is a modified version the 2016 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, developed at Indiana University's Center for Health Promotion (NSSHB 2016). It contains a variety of questions not only on sexual behaviors, but also on political and social attitudes. Since it is possible that some straight men have men partners (Silva and Whaley 2018; Ward 2015), we limit our analysis to sex acts with woman partners.

Focal Independent Variable

Feminist identity. To measure feminist identity, we use the question “Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?”—allowing participants to select (a) “Yes”; (b) “No”; (c) “Not sure”; or (d) “Prefer not to answer”. We code those who answered “Prefer not to answer” as missing.

Dependent Variables

Recency of sexual behaviors. We use two types of variables to measure participants' engagement in specific sexual behaviors. In the first type, we use the question “How recently have you done the following?”, followed by a list of sexual and romantic acts and the ability to select (a) “Done in past 30 days (past month)”; (b) “Done in past 90 days (three months)”; (b) “Done in the past 6 months”; (c) “Done in past year”; (e) “Done more than a year ago”; or (f) “Never done this.” We include the following sexual behaviors:

- I gave oral sex to a woman
- I had penile-vaginal intercourse
- A woman gave me oral sex

Most recent sexual experience. In the second type, participants were asked to recall the most recent time that you engaged in sexual activities with someone. Participants were then asked, “During this experience, which of the following activities occurred?” and were presented with a list of sexual behaviors, with instructions to select all that apply. The result is a list of binary yes/no responses to the following sexual behaviors:

- We had penile-vaginal intercourse
- I gave my partner oral sex
- We engaged in breast touching and/or nipple stimulation
- We engaged in vaginal fingering

Participant Demographics

Age. As social norms evolve over time, there may be generational variation in attitudes (Harris 1995). To determine participants’ age, we use the question “What is your year of birth?”. Using their answers, we categorized the responses into the following groups 18–34 years (reference); 35–44 years; 45–54 years; 55–64 years; and 65 years and above.

Education. It is important to control for education as individuals are often exposed to diverse people and ideas at higher levels of education, and there tends to be an association between educational attainment and social tolerance (Andersen and Fetner 2008). To measure education, we use the question “What is the highest level of education that you have attained?” with the following possible responses: (a) “Less than high school”; (b) “High school diploma”; (c) “Trades or apprenticeship certificate”; (d) “A college or CEGEP degree”; (e) “A university (bachelor’s) degree”; (f) “More than a university degree”; and (g) “Another post-secondary certificate or degree.” In our analysis, we collapse these responses into the following categories: high school or less (reference); college, trade, or similar; university; and more than university.

Visible minority. Literature has explored the racial and ethnic dimensions of masculinity, making clear that race and racism play a role in masculinities and sexuality (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Husbands et al. 2019). Statistics Canada commonly uses the term visible minority to describe non-white individuals (Statistics Canada 2020). To ascertain racial visible minority status, we use the question “Are you a visible minority?” and provided the response options: (a) “No, I am not”; (b) “Yes, I am”; and (c) “I am not sure.” For our analysis we combine the first and the third category, creating yes or no (reference) groups.

Religion. Religion is an important predictor of sexual attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Burke and Hudec 2015; Diefendorf 2015; Sumerau 2012). To account for religion, we use the question “What is your religion, if any?” utilizing the following categories for religious affiliation. They include (a) “Catholic”; (b) “Protestant, non-evangelical (including Anglican, Calvinist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian)”; (c) “Evangelical and Pentecostal (Evangelical; Pentecostals; Church of God; Assemblies of God; Universal Church of the Kingdom of God; Gospel; Christ Pentecostal Church; Christian Congregation; Mennonite; Brethren; Christian Reformed Church; Charismatic non-Catholic)”; (d) “Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) (Mormon)”; (e) “Jehovah’s Witness”; (f) “Muslim”; (g) “Sikh”; (h) “Jewish (Orthodox; Conservative; Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal)”; (i) “Greek Orthodox/Eastern Orthodox”; (j) “Other Non-Christian Eastern Religions (Buddhist; Hinduism; Taoist; Confucianism; Baha’i)”; (k) “Traditional or Aboriginal Religions”; (l) “None (Believe in a Supreme Entity but do not belong to any religion)”; (m) “Agnostic, atheist (Do not believe in God)”; and (n) “Other.” We collapse these responses into four categories: Catholic (reference); Protestant; Other; and None.

Relationship status. Relationship status may impact the sexual behaviors of participants (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012). We use the question “Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?” to determine participants’ relationship status. Participants could select (a) “Single and not dating”; (b) “Single and dating/hanging out with someone”; (c) “In a relationship but not living together”; (d) “Living together but not married”; (e) “Married and living together”; (f) “Married but not living together”; or (g) “Other (specify).” In our analysis, we collapse responses d through f as married or living with a partner.

Procedure

We begin by presenting the descriptive statistics for our variables. In the next phase, our two types of dependent variables call for different analytic approaches. To analyze associations between feminist identity and the recency of participants’ sexual behaviors (measured by the set of “How recently have you done the following?” questions), we develop a series of ordinal logistic regression models. To examine associations between feminist identity and the types of sexual activity in participants’ most recent sexual experience (measured by the set of “during this experience, which of the following activities occurred?” questions), we develop a series of logistic regression models. In all models we control for age, relationship status, education, identification as a member of a visible minority group, and religion.

Results

We begin our analysis with an examination of the rates of feminist identification. In Table 1, we present our descriptive statistics. This table shows the demographic

Table 1. Social and Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

| | Total (N=944) | Feminist (N=206) | Not Feminist (N=570) | Not Sure (N=168) |
|--|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Feminist | | | | |
| Yes | 21.8% | | | |
| No | 60.4% | | | |
| Not sure | 17.8% | | | |
| Age group | | | | |
| 18–34 years | 26.4% | 26.2% | 26.0% | 28.0% |
| 35–44 years | 17.0% | 13.6% | 17.4% | 19.6% |
| 45–54 years | 18.1% | 16.0% | 19.8% | 14.9% |
| 55–64 years | 17.9% | 14.6% | 19.0% | 18.5% |
| 65+ | 20.7% | 29.6% | 17.9% | 19.1% |
| Visible minority | | | | |
| Yes | 18.3% | 18.5% | 18.4% | 17.9% |
| No | 81.7% | 81.6% | 81.6% | 82.1% |
| Education | | | | |
| High school or less | 29.0% | 22.3% | 32.1% | 26.8% |
| College, trade, or similar | 38.1% | 31.6% | 42.1% | 32.7% |
| University | 19.9% | 27.7% | 15.4% | 25.0% |
| More than university | 13.0% | 18.5% | 10.4% | 15.5% |
| Relationship status | | | | |
| Single and not dating | 26.2% | 25.4% | 25.6% | 29.3% |
| Single and dating | 8.2% | 10.5% | 7.9% | 6.1% |
| In a relationship, not living together | 6.1% | 5.5% | 6.9% | 4.3% |
| Married or living with partner | 59.6% | 58.7% | 59.6% | 60.4% |
| Religion | | | | |
| Catholic | 34.4% | 30.5% | 35.5% | 35.7% |
| Protestant | 18.3% | 14.0% | 20.2% | 17.2% |
| Other | 14.1% | 13.5% | 13.1% | 18.5% |
| None | 33.2% | 42.0% | 31.3% | 28.7% |

descriptive statistics for the entire sample, for those who identify as feminist, do not identify as feminist, and those who are not sure.

Although there is a recent increase in support for feminism in popular culture, our analysis of the descriptive statistics evidences only about one-fifth of the men in our sample identify as a feminist. In total, 21.8% of heterosexual men participants identify as feminists. Our findings support the contention that many men are unwilling to adopt a feminist identity, perhaps because of the stigma and negative connotation attached to feminism vis-à-vis traditional masculine norms and expectations (Silver, Chadwick, and van Anders 2019). We observe little demographic variability in identification with feminist identity across visible minority and

relationship status. We do, however, find select discrepancies in certain age groups, levels of education, and religion. Feminist men are more highly educated than non-feminists. Of those identifying as feminist, 27.7% have a university degree and 18.5% have more than a university degree, compared to non-feminists reporting 15.4% and 10.4%, respectively. Those who are not sure are in the middle, with 25% having a university degree and 15.5% more than a university degree. Looking at the age groups, we find that feminists tend to be in the 65+ years category. That is to say, 29.6% of feminist identifying men are 65+ years compared to 19.1% of those who are “not sure” and 17.9% of non-feminists. There is also a disparity by religion—42% of feminists are non-religious whereas only 31.3% of non-feminists are non-religious, and “not sure” are 28.7%.

Overall, these findings build on the widely recognized notion that women with higher levels of education are more likely to claim a feminist identity, and this proclivity extends to highly educated men (McCabe 2005), suggesting education is associated with gender progressiveness. Similarly, our findings parallel those of previous studies as showing disparity in feminist identification by age cohort (see Peltola, Milkie, and Presser 2004; Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003).

To consider the association between men’s feminist identification and the recency of partnered sexual behavior, we use ordinal logistic regression models. We begin our analysis by determining whether feminist men have had sex more recently than non-feminist men. In Table 2, we examine the association between feminist identity and a series of sexual behaviors using ordinal logistic regression while controlling for covariates. First, we look at penile-vaginal intercourse and find that feminist men report having intercourse more recently than non-feminist men ($b=0.38, p<0.05$).

Next, we examine the recency of receiving oral sex from a woman and find that feminist men have received oral sex more recently than non-feminists ($b=0.36, p<0.05$). These findings contrast with Kornrich and colleagues (2013). Although their study is limited to heterosexual married couples, they find that more egalitarian couples have less sex compared to couples conforming to traditional gendered roles such as where men disengage from housework—tasks that are stereotypically done by women. Moreover, the literature suggests men may shy away from a feminist identity due to perceived negative stereotypes regarding sexual prowess and attractiveness (Twenge and Zucker 1999; Wiley et al. 2012). However, rather than experiencing negative repercussions to one’s intimate life, our findings indicate a positive association between feminist identity and recency of having intercourse and receiving oral sex from a woman.

Next, we turn to an examination of the association between feminist identity and sex acts prioritizing women’s pleasure. Specifically, we focus on giving oral sex, as this act tends to be focused on giving pleasure to the person receiving it (Chambers 2007). The findings show a significant association between men’s feminist identity and their reported recency of giving a woman oral sex ($b=0.46, p<0.01$). We note that men who are not sure if they are feminists do not significantly differ from

Table 2. Recency of Sexual Behaviors.

| How Recently Have You Done the Following? | | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|-----------|
| | Have Intercourse | Receive Oral | Give Oral |
| Feminist | | | |
| No (ref) | | | |
| Not sure | 0.08 | -0.14 | 0.16 |
| Yes | 0.38** | 0.36** | 0.46*** |
| Age | | | |
| 18–34 years (ref) | | | |
| 35–44 years | 0.07 | -0.21 | -0.27 |
| 45–54 years | -0.07 | -0.57*** | -0.42** |
| 55–64 years | -0.63*** | -1.19*** | -0.98*** |
| 65+ years | -1.40*** | -1.81*** | -1.78*** |
| Relationship status | | | |
| Single and not dating (ref) | | | |
| Single and dating | 1.88*** | 1.61*** | 1.64*** |
| In a relationship, not living together | 2.43*** | 2.06*** | 2.16*** |
| Married or living with partner | 2.03*** | 1.36*** | 1.56*** |
| Education | | | |
| High School or less (ref) | | | |
| College, trade or similar | -0.08 | 0.12 | -0.01 |
| University degree | -0.17 | 0.25 | 0.14 |
| More than university | -0.45** | -0.48** | -0.41* |
| Visible minority | | | |
| No (ref) | | | |
| Yes | -0.53*** | -0.79 | -0.91*** |
| Religion | | | |
| Catholic (ref) | | | |
| Protestant | 0.17 | -0.07 | -0.28 |
| Other | -0.14 | -0.20 | -0.22 |
| None | 0.24 | 0.15 | 0.12 |
| Intercept 1 | -1.13 | -1.28 | -1.12 |
| Intercept 2 | 0.44 | 0.08 | 0.40 |
| Intercept 3 | 0.76 | 0.43 | 0.77 |
| Intercept 4 | 1.15 | 0.87 | 1.09 |
| Intercept 5 | 1.53 | 1.33 | 1.59 |

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

non-feminist men on any of these three measures. As evidenced in the literature, hegemonic masculine norms are associated with the sexual dominance of women enacted in part through the prioritization of men's sexual pleasure. Alternative masculinities—especially feminist ones—may create space within heterosexual relationships for men to give oral sex, prioritizing women's pleasure. If there is indeed a cultural stigma associated with men's oral sex on women partners, a

Table 3. Most Recent Sexual Experience.

| | Intercourse | Give Oral | Breast Touching | Vaginal Fingering |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| During This Experience, Which of the Following Activities Occurred? | | | | |
| Feminist | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | |
| Not sure | 0.66*** | 0.57*** | 0.57*** | 0.27 |
| Yes | 0.39** | 0.55*** | 0.73*** | 0.00 |
| Age | | | | |
| 18–34 years (ref) | | | | |
| 35–44 years | 0.18 | 0.11 | 0.27 | -0.05 |
| 45–54 years | 0.63*** | 0.14 | 0.24 | 0.36 |
| 55–64 years | 0.95*** | 0.09 | 0.82*** | 0.34 |
| 65+ years | 0.29 | -0.69*** | 0.05 | -0.07 |
| Relationship status | | | | |
| Single and not dating (ref) | | | | |
| Single and dating | 0.38 | -0.02 | -0.06 | -0.16 |
| In a relationship, not living together | 0.69* | -0.18 | 0.36 | -0.14 |
| Married or living with partner | 0.16 | -0.02 | 0.67*** | -0.03 |
| Education | | | | |
| High School or less (ref) | | | | |
| College, trade or similar | -0.39* | -0.05 | -0.14 | 0.03 |
| University degree | -0.39 | -0.42* | -0.06 | 0.30 |
| More than university | 0.75*** | -0.60** | -0.68*** | -0.61** |
| Visible minority | | | | |
| No (ref) | | | | |
| Yes | -0.61*** | -0.09 | -0.11 | -0.32 |
| Religion | | | | |
| Catholic (ref) | | | | |
| Protestant | 0.50** | -0.41* | 0.91*** | 0.07 |
| Other | 0.22 | -0.23 | 0.06 | -0.21 |
| None | 0.88*** | 0.14 | 0.81*** | 0.26 |
| Constant | -0.10 | -0.50 | -0.52 | 0.17 |

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

feminist identity may provide men with more power than non-feminist men to resist that stigma.

Probing these findings, we focus on the specific sexual acts in participants' most recent sexual encounter. In Table 3, we present a series of logistic regression models to examine the association between feminist identity and sexual behaviors in participants' most recent sexual experience, controlling for our covariates. First, we regress feminist identity on penile-vaginal intercourse. We find that both the group

responding “not sure” ($b=0.66, p<0.01$) and the feminist group ($b=0.39, p<0.05$) are more likely to report having intercourse in their most recent sexual encounter than the non-feminist group. Coinciding with findings from our previous models, non-feminist men have intercourse less recently than feminists, and they are also less likely to report having intercourse in their last sexual event, relative to feminists and those who are not sure. This suggests non-feminist men have less active sex lives in terms of penile-vaginal intercourse.

Next, we examine oral sex and find that feminists ($b=0.55, p<0.01$) and the not sure group ($b=0.57, p<0.01$) are more likely to report giving oral sex in their most recent sexual encounter than non-feminists. This finding is perhaps most relevant to the literature on gender inequality in heterosexual sex. In other words, we find that feminist identification is associated with a critical sexual behavior that focuses on women’s sexual pleasure and orgasm. We argue this suggests men who disavow feminism place less importance on their women partners’ sexual pleasure in heterosexual. In our third model, we find that feminists ($b=0.73, p<0.01$) and not sure ($b=0.57, p<0.01$) report higher levels of engaging in breast or nipple stimulation to their partner than non-feminists. Lastly, we consider if feminist identity is associated with participants’ engagement in vaginal fingering, but do not find a statistically significant association.

In sum, feminists report having intercourse, performing, and receiving oral sex more recently than non-feminist men. Feminists also report more intercourse, performance of oral sex on a woman and breast touching in last sexual encounter. Those who are not sure if they are feminists report more intercourse, performance of oral sex on a woman and breast touching in last sexual encounters than non-feminists. Taken together, non-feminist men report fewer sex acts that prioritize women partners’ pleasure. These findings suggest that men’s relationship to feminism is relevant to, and meaningful within, their interpersonal sexual encounters with women. Those attached to traditional masculine norms have different types of sex with women than feminists, while ambivalence toward a feminist identity can be a progressive step to the valuation of women’s pleasure.

Discussion and Conclusion

The many forms of masculinity available in the current socio-political environment create questions for researchers about the relationship between men’s expressions of masculinity and their interpersonal behavior. Feminist identity in men is a signal of rejection of masculinities contributing to gender inequality, but scholarship to date has called into question whether signifying behaviors like expressing a feminist identity or supporting feminist beliefs result in resistance to gender inequality in interactions with women. The aim of this research is to consider whether the affirmation of feminist identity is associated with private sexual activity between men and women. That is, do feminist men’s identities correspond with egalitarian private heterosexual relations? Specifically, we consider whether men who claim a feminist

identity have more sex than non-feminist men. We further examine whether feminist men engage in different types of sex than non-feminist men—sexual acts more prioritizing of women’s pleasure.

Many suggest that most men’s proclamations of gender egalitarianism fail to produce parallel equitable behavior. However, most studies examine public attitudes and behaviors while few investigate the relationship between public identity and private behavior (see Bird 1996; Bridges 2014; Grazian 2007; Heath 2003). There can be wide variation in public and private presentations of self. In public many men may adhere to traditional sexual scripts and feel pressure to demonstrate acts of sexual dominance; however, in private, many may incline toward romantic affection and have greater willingness to distance themselves from traditional gender expectations (Pascoe 2007). While sex is a social interaction governed by social norms, it is also for the most part private. This privacy makes it difficult for researchers to access, but we cannot assume that private interactions are simple reflections of what we see in other social settings. In private heterosexual intimate encounters, men are out of the sight and judgment of other men, allowing masculinities to play out differently (Montemurro and Riehmman-Murphy 2019). This research is unique in that it provides insights on the interface of feminist sexuality and masculinity. It extends the examination of inequitable gender relationships to the intimacy of private sex acts, where conscious and unconscious gendered and sexual inequality may play out.

Our analyses establish a clear association between feminist identity and sexual behavior. Limiting our analysis to heterosexual-identifying men, we find that behind closed doors, non-feminist men engage in different sexual behaviors with women partners than self-identified feminist men and those who are more ambivalent about feminism. Feminist men report having penile-vaginal intercourse, as well as both performing and receiving oral sex with women partners, more recently than non-feminist men. Feminist men and those responding “not sure” are significantly more likely than non-feminists to report that, in their most recent sexual encounter, they engaged in intercourse, performed oral sex on partners, and engaged in breast touching. In sum, relative to non-feminists, those embracing feminism along with those not sure, report engaging in acts more pleasurable for women.

What might explain these associations between feminist identity and sexual behavior? Several possible explanations exist. One possibility is that our participants were not truthful and feminist men framed their sexual lives as egalitarian. For instance, feminist men may be more inclined to report giving oral sex to a woman. While it is always possible that participants may lie on surveys, we are confident that these data have captured the most accurate picture possible of Canadian sexuality. We use a survey instrument that has been fully vetted by a team of experts and administered several times in the United States (NSSHB 2016). As an online survey, participants have a greater degree of distance from survey takers, who never meet participants or even collect their names. In addition, the survey questionnaire orders the questions such that sexual behavior questions were answered before questions of

feminist identity, so that the latter could not have primed the participants' responses on sexuality. Until additional surveys can be delivered under different conditions, we argue that this is the best information available at the current moment. A second possibility is that the sexual partners of these groups differ from each other in significant ways. For example, it may be the case that heterosexual feminist men are more likely than other men to partner with feminist women. If so, it may be that these women exert their sexual agency by communicating their preferences for pleasurable sexual activity or by creating a safe space for exploration of different types of sexual activities. Unfortunately, we cannot test for this possibility, so we will leave it to future research. A third possibility is simply that the adoption of a feminist identity by men is an expression of a masculine self that adheres to values of gender equality. In contrast, a response of "no" to the question "are you a feminist?" represents a clear rejection of those values, and an embrace of traditional masculinity. A preference for traditional masculinity may be straightforwardly expressed in sexual interactions with an approach to sex that includes less attention to women's pleasure, while a commitment to feminism may be expressed through sexual interactions that center women's pleasure and greater concern for their partner's opinions of them.

We contend these findings have implications for gender inequality in terms of sexual pleasure, particularly the gender gap in orgasms. Clitoral stimulation in oral sex prioritizes women's pleasure and increases the likelihood of women's orgasm (see Herbenick et al. 2018; Richters, de Visser, and Smith 2006; Willis et al. 2018). Armstrong and colleagues (2012) found oral sex nearly doubled the odds for women's orgasm in hook-ups, and more than doubled the odds when in relationships. Our findings show that non-feminist men are less likely to perform oral sex on their women partners, relative to both feminist men and to those who are not sure whether they are feminists. In other words, men's relationship to feminist identity has substantial personal implications for women's pleasure in this most intimate setting.

We do not have data on what these sexual behaviors mean to our participants. We cannot distinguish between men who are caring and concerned about their women partners' pleasure and those for whom bringing a woman to orgasm is an indication of their sexual prowess (e.g., Allen 2003; Hyde et al. 2009). Pleasing a partner can be viewed from a phallocentric, male-dominated perspective with women's orgasms enhancing dominant masculinity, providing little implication for egalitarian sex or genuine concern about women's pleasure (Chadwick and van Anders 2017; Walker 2020). However, regardless of whether or not feminist men and those who are ambivalent are intentional in their commitment to gender equality during sexual encounters, care more about women's impressions of them, or are proving their own feminism, their behavior is significantly different from non-feminists. Thus, we argue that heterosex is an important arena of social life where gender (in)equality can play out. We leave it to future qualitative analyses of sexual encounters to probe

feminist men's intentions behind the provision of sexual pleasure for women partners.

Similarly, our study cannot answer whether some men adopt a feminist identity to increase their access to sexual partners. However, our findings that feminist men report engaging in penile-vaginal intercourse and receive oral sex more recently than non-feminist men indicates these men are not sacrificing their own pleasure at the expense of their partners'. Feminist men continue to benefit from traditional sexual scripts that contribute to sexual behavior associated with men's orgasm and pleasure. At the same time, the enactment of masculinity depends on and may change with context, circumstance, "audience" and setting. The results indicate that in private intimate sexual events beyond the gaze of other men, feminist identity is associated with men's engagement in sexual behavior prioritizing women's pleasure.

Another limitation is that our sample size does not allow us to provide more fine-grained analyses of specific racial/ethnic groups beyond visible minority status or class categories. It is possible that social locations of race and class affect these findings as literature shows that the unique racial and class-based marginalization experienced by different groups of men can impact the strategies used to claim masculine identity (Chen 1999, Majors and Billson 1993, Pyke 1996). Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate on criteria for distinguishing a "feminist." Research uses a variety of different measures for fulfilling the "feminist" criteria (McCabe 2005). This study measured feminist identity using self-identification rather than gender-related attitudes or beliefs that constitute participants' understanding of feminism. Future analyses are necessary to dig into the impact feminist identity plays on men's understandings of their masculinity and sexuality, and associations with social attitudes about gender.

Our findings contribute to the literature in several ways. First, our study bridges masculinities and sexualities literatures by examining the performance of masculinity in sexual encounters. We contend that gender power inequality and oppression can be revealed in the sexual behavior of private encounters. The notion that hegemonic masculine expectations may be lifted in interactions behind closed doors, hidden from the scrutiny of other men, is an important contribution. By shifting the focus of investigation away from public performance of masculinity to intimate encounters between men and women, this research adds a unique perspective to understanding recent transformations in masculinities. Second, masculinity scholars contend the crux of masculinities scholarship is in understanding the interpersonal production and reproduction of gender inequality, yet many studies veer away from this goal. Through an examination of intimate interactions between men and women, merging sexuality and masculinities fields, we believe this research addresses an under-theorized dimension whereby gender inequality is discernable. In private intimate sexual encounters, feminist men and even those who are ambivalent toward feminism report performing sexual behaviors that focus on their women partners' pleasure at a higher rate than those who disavow feminism, suggesting an emphasis on greater equality in sexual pleasure. Finally, although studies show professed

values to have little influence on behavior, our findings suggest that feminist self-identity matters in intimate settings. Men's public persona, ideology, and social identity are carried into sexual interactions and behaviors. Non-feminist men report lower levels of sexual egalitarianism evidenced in behaviors of sexual dominance prioritizing their own sexual pleasure over their partners. This study therefore shows that the bedroom is a place where gender inequality is both reproduced and mitigated. Masculinities scholarship would benefit from exploring sex as a site for gender inequality in sexual pleasure, but also an opportunity for men to transcend traditional masculine scripts, express emotions, and refrain from sexual dominance. We invite conversations and hope further research engages the issue of inequality in private heterosexual relations.

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