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# Men as Students and Teachers of Feminist Scholarship

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**Michael Flood<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

When men participate as students in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) classrooms, they undergo feminist change. They adopt more progressive understandings of gender, show greater support for feminism, and increase their involvement in anti-sexist activism. Male students in WGS classrooms benefit to the same degree as female students, showing similar levels of change, although they start with poorer attitudes and thus the gap between them and their female peers persists. At the same time, male students' presence highlights critical challenges to feminist pedagogy: gendered patterns of interaction, resistance to feminist teaching, and limitations on women's critical reflections on personal experience. When men teach WGS, typically they are "graded up"—evaluated by students as less biased and more competent than female professors. Male professors face distinct dilemmas in teaching about gender inequality from a position of privilege. Yet, like male students, they can adopt traitorous and antipatriarchal social locations and standpoints, developing pedagogies for and by the privileged.

## **Keywords**

Masculinity, Pedagogy, Women's Studies, Gender Studies, University

## **Introduction**

Men have long been a "problem" for Women's Studies, in four ways. In the first place, men are the problem: forms of men's power and privilege over women have

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<sup>1</sup> School of Social Sciences, Media and Communications, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

## **Corresponding Author:**

Michael Flood, Sociology, School of Social Sciences, Media and Communications, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia  
Email: [mflood@uow.edu.au](mailto:mflood@uow.edu.au)

been the subject of sustained feminist critique. Second, there is a rapidly expanding literature focused self-consciously on men as men, whose relationship to feminist theory is not always sympathetic. Third, men increasingly participate in students in Women's Studies classes, which raises issues for the processes of feminist education. Fourth, men are taking on, writing, and even teaching feminist theory, which raises issues about epistemology and men's relationship to feminist knowledge. This article focuses on the last two. It examines the practices and politics of men's participation in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) classrooms, both as students and teachers.

This article's trajectory from men as students in Women's Studies to men as teachers in WGS reflects my own. I undertook undergraduate study in Women's Studies in the late 1980s, at Ages 18–20, and then a PhD in the late 1990s in what was by then Gender and Sexuality Studies. Throughout this period, I was also involved in profeminist men's activism, particularly in relation to violence against women. I worked as a tutor (teaching assistant) in several Women's Studies courses, and later wrote and convened for 3 years (2001–2003) a first-year course in Gender Studies. I have maintained both an intellectual focus on gender and sexuality in more recent academic appointments and an ongoing involvement in activism and community education.

### **Men as Students**

Men are a regular minority of students in WGS classrooms. Judging from the samples used in various surveys of WGS courses in North America and Australia, men typically represent at least 10 percent of the students. Studies find proportions of male students in classes focused on gender varying from 10 percent (Case 2007, 430; Sevelius and Stake 2003, 2343) to 30 percent (Geffner and McClure 1990; Harris, Melaas, and Rodacker 1999, 972). Little is known about the profile of male students, and this is likely to vary as a function of the course level (entry or first year compared to later year), the institutional requirements shaping enrolment, the discipline(s) with which the course is associated, the university, and other factors.<sup>1</sup> More widely, there has been remarkably little empirical attention to the experience of male students in WGS or the significance of their presence for female students or for learning and teaching in general.

There is obvious value in men learning feminist scholarship. First, there is a political imperative for men's gender awareness. Whether men gain understanding of feminist theory and politics through university study or other means, this understanding can serve to create an awareness of gender inequality and a commitment to its eradication. Cognitive awareness, of course, is no guarantee of affective commitment to feminist goals, let alone of behavioral change toward gender equality, but it is necessary. This political imperative is grounded in the wider recognition that transforming men—transforming men's attitudes, behaviors, and the social relations in which they engage—is vital to building gender equality. Overlapping with this,

there is an intellectual imperative. At the level of universities themselves, feminist scholarship is a desirable element in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences education of female and male students alike.

What is the impact of men's participation in university Women's Studies courses? I focus first on the meaning and effect of participation for male students themselves, rather than for their female peers, particularly as I have claimed that men can gain feminist knowledge and this can foster personal and social change. To assess this, we must draw on a developing body of research regarding the impact of participation in WGS in general. This research typically uses as its sample the largely female classes of university courses in WGS (or focused on women and gender), and uses quantitative measures to examine shifts in attitudes and behaviors. Such research is not focused on the significance for men in particular of participation in the feminist classroom but does provide valuable pointers to this. I draw only on those studies with both male and female students in their samples. This research is complemented by a handful of qualitative studies of men's experience, and I return to these below.

Women's Studies, particularly in its inception, was positioned as the academic arm of the feminist movement, intended to transform students' understandings and inspire their participation in feminist activism (Stake 2007, 43). Various studies over past two decades document that WGS does fulfill this promise, among both female and male students.

Students who undertake courses in WGS show declining support for traditional attitudes toward gender roles and greater awareness of sexism (Stake 2007). For instance, a 4-year longitudinal study found that men who had taken WGS courses declined more in gender role traditionalism than other men, with further associations found, for example, with majoring in the humanities (Bryant 2003). Another found more progressive gender role orientations after participation in Women's Studies courses relative to controls, among both female and male students (Harris, Melaas, and Rodacker 1999), another documented a shift among students from more essentialist to more constructionist explanations for gender difference (Yoder et al. 2007), and another found increases in students' awareness of male privilege and support for feminist policy measures (Case 2007). (Various studies also examine the impact of WGS on feminist identification but these confine themselves to female students [Yoder et al. 2007].)

There are also shifts related to activism. Male and female students, compared to non-WGS students, show an increased intention to participate in feminist activism and an increased involvement in activist behaviors, and these activist intentions and behaviors persist long after the courses have ended (Stake and Hoffmann 2001). The WGS classes thus "are effective in developing student commitment to feminist activism" (Stake 2007, 51). Students are particularly likely to show increases in such activist behaviors as talking to others to influence their attitudes regarding women's rights and confronting other students about their sexist practices. These impacts are likely to reflect the influences of both cognitive, intellectual learning and personal, experiential learning. As Stake (2007, 53) notes,

This dual emphasis is embodied in the feminist pedagogical goals of critical thinking, by which students develop skills in analyzing patriarchal gendered societal structures and practices, and participatory learning, by which they come to recognize links between their own personal experiences and course material.

For men, as for women, it is clear therefore that studying feminist scholarship at university leads to positive shifts in attitudes toward gender, understandings of sexism, and activist intentions and involvements. There are five further patterns to note. First, as one might expect, these studies consistently find that the men who enter WGS courses have more egalitarian and feminist attitudes than other men. There is a “self-selection” effect at work, in that at the point when they first enter the feminist classroom, men (and women) are more predisposed than other students of the same sex entering other classrooms to be sympathetic to feminist scholarship (Yoder et al. 2007).

Second, and related to this, there is evidence that students who begin WGS classes with more feminist attitudes also are more likely than other WGS students to have a positive response to their classes (Stake and Malkin 2003), and that students with greater awareness of sexism before WGS are more likely to increase their involvements in activist behavior afterwards (Stake 2007, 50–2). Some studies have found that among WGS students in general, there is greatest attitude change among those who initially have the least feminist attitudes (Sevelius and Stake 2003; Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008, 192; Thomsen, Basu, and Reinitz 1995). However, there is a methodological problem here. Students who enter WGS classrooms with more conservative views have greater room to change toward feminist attitudes than students with more feminist views. On the other hand, students with progressive attitudes toward gender appear to show little improvement in participating in WGS because their attitudes already are at close to ceiling levels. A more recent study attempted to circumvent the problem of “ceiling effects,” by asking students to report the extent to which their awareness of sexism had changed as a result of the class, including a greater variety of measures of gender attitudes, and measuring other aspects of class responsiveness. This found that students who began their WGS classes with more feminist attitudes showed more positive change in their awareness of sexism and openness to gender diversity, as well as reporting better classroom relationships and greater feelings of empowerment than other students (Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008). The relationship between WGS classes and students’ responses is mediated to some degree by their classroom relationships:

Those who described strong alliances with their teachers and cohesion with their classmates changed more in their gender attitudes, felt more empowered by their classes, and were less angered and distressed (Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008, 207).

While the men who choose to participate in WGS tend to have more progressive orientations toward gender than other men, they have worse attitudes than the

women who also choose to undertake these courses. That is, there is a gender gap in attitudes and behaviors among the male and female students who enter WGS (Case 2007, 427; Geffner and McClure 1990; Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008). Entering WGS, male students have better attitudes than men who do not undertake these courses but worse attitudes than the women who have also chosen such courses.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this body of scholarship is that, in most cases, male and female students participating in WGS courses show similar rates of improvement in the gender-related attitudes and behaviors measured. The fourth pattern to note therefore is that men and women improve by similar margins (Case 2007, 427; Harris, Melaas, and Rodacker 1999, 975; Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008). Both men and women benefit from participation in WGS, and they appear to benefit to the same degree. Of course, this also means that the gender gap in these students' attitudes which existed prior to undertaking WGS also persists after study.

While most studies report positive impacts among both female and male students, it should be noted that some early examinations find no change among male students. Two early studies found that while female students' attitudes shifted in positive directions, male students' attitudes remained the same. In a study in 1975–1976 of fifty-two students including fifteen men, two psychology courses had little effect on men's attitudes toward women, although their self-descriptions became less masculine and more androgynous after one course (Vedovato and Vaughter 1980). In a study over 1982–1989 of 430 students including 140 or so males participating in courses on the psychology of sex roles, their attitudes remained unchanged while female students' attitudes shifted in a liberal direction (Geffner and McClure 1990). Another study with a much smaller sample of male students (six to eight men) reported a mixed pattern of positive and negative change. Thomsen, Basu, and Reinitz (1995) report that while male students' belief in gender stereotypes declined, so did their support for feminist attitudes.

The WGS courses are largely positive experiences for male (and female) students, more positive than other courses, and this is the fifth pattern to note. The WGS courses sometimes have been characterized by conservative commentators as distressing and coercive for students. Given feminism's "male-bashing" reputation, WGS classes are widely assumed to be hostile and unpleasant spaces for male students in particular. However, students themselves report that WGS classes have more positive effects on their lives than non-WGS classes (Stake 2006, 2007). A large-scale examination among over 650 U.S. students found little increase in distress or anger, whether among female or male students but substantial increases in students' feelings of empowerment (Stake 2007, 52). Feelings of anger and distress in relation to WGS classes are very low for male and female students. Although men did not rate the quality of their classroom relationships as positively as women, and they reported less feelings of empowerment, they still found WGS to be a positive experience (Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008). In addition, early research finds that male students in Women's Studies experienced greater gains in self-esteem, job confidence, and job motivation than non-WS male students (Stake and Gerner 1987).

Alongside the quantitative research described thus far, there is a tiny body of qualitative research addressing male participation in university WGS (George 1992; Ghadially 1991; McDavid 1988; Miner 1994). This is remarkable given how routinely men participate in WGS courses on campuses. While Miner's sample of ten students is too small and potentially skewed to be taken as representative of men in Women's Studies, her account does highlight some key patterns which may characterize men's experience. Miner (1994) suggests that one of the most important aspects of men's position in the WGS classroom is their minority status.

What is important for men about Women's Studies, Miner (1994) argues, is that it offers them the experience of being outside the circle, of being marginal, and this "minority experience" is a significant learning one. While men are outnumbered in most Arts and Humanities classes in contemporary universities, in Women's Studies they are outnumbered to a greater degree. More importantly, they are positioned as both marginal (as women are the key topic here, notwithstanding the increasing focus on men's gendered lives), and as on problematic center stage (given that "men" often are the problem; Miner 1994, 453). The male students in Miner's study reported that they felt "highly visible, subject to stereotyping, and a loss of individuality." They experienced stigma for their choice of Women's Studies, particularly from male peers (including teasing, attempted dissuasion, and concerns about the feminizing and homosexualizing influence of participation); anxieties about their participation; an ongoing sense of scrutiny and visibility; self-silencing (out of concern about calling further attention to themselves, disagreeing with majority opinion, or lack of knowledge); a sense of being "left out" or marginal given the focus on women; and a discomfort with their marginal status. Asked what they had learned during the course, the men emphasized that they now saw their male peers more critically, they had gained new perspectives and greater ability to relate to particular women, and their brief experience of minority status had given them new understanding of minorities' experience.

Other reports corroborate some of the themes identified here. Alilunas (2011) describes his position in undergraduate Women's Studies classes of simultaneous visibility and invisibility. Similarly, in a newspaper item on men in Women's Studies, a male third-year feminist studies major commented, "As a man, to be involved with feminist studies, you have to be very open to the idea that you're the privileged people, and you have to be willing to be uncomfortable some of the time" (Yazgan 2008). On the other hand, one of the few men enrolled in a gender studies major at the University of California, a gay-identified student pursuing queer theory, emphasized his comfort in classes (Hokama 2008).

Such patterns suggest that temporary experiences of "otherness" can contribute to men's ability to develop antipatriarchal understandings. These experiences come about when men are located in an immediate social context in which they are made "other" and the original and oppressed "Other" becomes in a sense the norm (for example, through sheer force of numbers), problematizing their identities and locations (Stanley and Wise 1990). However, whether male students in feminist classes

experience themselves as “other,” and whether this then leads to productive reflection and change, is likely to depend on how their otherness is managed and understood.

Several other themes appear common in male students’ experiences of WGS classrooms. One is an expectation among female students that male students will speak for all men, offer expertise on masculinity, or inevitably embody stereotypically masculine traits (Alilunas, 2011). Another is the assumption that men who take Women’s Studies class must be gay. This reflects the pervasively heteronormative construction of masculinity and the homophobic policing of men’s violations of gender boundaries. At the same time, it is likely that gay, bisexual, or queer-identified men are a greater proportion of male students in WGS than among men in general. In addition, heterosexual men who undertake WGS may be more open as a result to the questioning and transgression of sexual categories.

### **Male Dominance and Resistance in the Classroom**

So far, it seems that WGS is good for both women and men, and both take up feminist attitudes and feminist activism in response to their involvement. However, the presence of men in the WGS classroom is in contradiction at least to some early formulations of feminist pedagogy. Two pieces written in 1983 argue that, as Klein states, there is “no room for men in Women’s Studies, none whatsoever” (Klein 1983, 413; Mahoney 1983). This position has all but disappeared in feminist writing, although it was defended recently by Boston College Women’s Studies professor Mary Daly.<sup>2</sup> While it was motivated by a concern about the impact of men’s participation on women, contemporary scholarship on WGS says little about the significance of male students’ presence, whether for them or their female peers. Nevertheless, male participation does highlight three issues: gendered patterns of interaction, resistance to feminist teaching, and women’s consciousness-raising.

When men are present in the Women’s Studies classroom, gendered power relations and gendered constructions of authority and knowledge are said to constrain women’s ability to develop feminist understandings, at least according to early commentators. Mahoney observed (in the early 1980s) that in Women’s Studies courses, some male students quickly realize the ways in which feminist understandings threaten their vested interests, may react aggressively, and are able to monopolize the space such that it remains fixed in male definitions, for example, of “men being got at” (Mahoney 1983). These interactions constrain women’s potential feminist understandings, and reinforce to women the dangers of confronting patriarchal norms and controls.

Klein (1983) identifies three typical “styles” among men, which are not exclusive to Women’s Studies and which are shared among men as students, teachers, or administrators. There is the expert, who treats feminist theory as just another body of knowledge which can be wielded with his masculine expert authority. There is the ignoramus, who tells women that he has no idea what Women’s Studies and feminism are, and would the women please tell him. And there is the poor dear, who say it



is awful and a terrible burden to be a member of the dominant group, and who looks toward women to save him (Klein 1983). Each of these forms reproduces traditional gendered patterns of relating. Men claim attention and take up space, while women are invited to defer to masculine expert authority, deal with men's problems, rescue and ego-massage them, and to heap praise on the signs of understanding from men that they would take for granted from women (Klein 1983).

Such patterns of gendered interaction undoubtedly persist to some degree in contemporary WGS classes. If feminist classrooms are supposed to be egalitarian and empowering, then men's presence clearly may undermine this ideal. At the same time, these patterns seem less debilitating than was supposed. Given that most contemporary WGS classes do include male students, if men's presence was profoundly deleterious for women's feminist learning, one would expect to see little progressive change among female students through their participation in such courses. Instead, the evidence suggests that men's presence does not prevent women from undergoing significant positive changes in their support for gender equality, commitment to feminist activism, and actual involvement in activism. Of course, it is possible that such changes are or would be greater in women-only classes, and no comparison of female students' outcomes in mixed-sex and women-only classes has been done to test this.

Men's presence in the WGS classroom may stymie feminist pedagogy in further ways, associated with male students' active opposition to WGS. This has often been framed as "resistance" to feminist teaching. As Orr (1993, 239) notes, "resistant students cannot learn effectively themselves and may seriously hamper the learning of their fellow students," and this nullifies a fundamental claim of feminist pedagogy and of critical educational theory more generally, to be emancipatory. In the broadest sense, "resistance" can refer to disagreement with or criticism of feminist claims: minimizing or discounting the existence of sexism, denying personal advantage or disadvantage, or offering essentialist or determinist accounts of gender inequalities (Stake, Sevelius, and Hanly 2008, 190). However, other forms of resistance are more challenging, and range from more passive to more active: class absence and classroom silence; superficial assent; and anger and hostility, including insults and silencing (Orr 1993).

Male students are a significant source of resistance in the feminist classroom. This resistance has been theorized in various ways. It has been interpreted in straightforwardly political terms, as a defense of privilege: as an expression of an attempt at protection of the personal and social goods associated with masculinity, and a function of the challenge feminism poses to men socialized to norms of masculinity. Resistance also has been seen in more psychoanalytic terms, as an expression of the contradictions of masculinity, for example, the contradiction between a self-identity centered on domination and control and the lived experience of powerlessness and conformity (Orr 1993, 244). Pleasants (2011) provides a rich account of the discourses reinforcing male privilege among male students professing a sympathy for feminism.



Resistance to feminist teaching undoubtedly comes particularly from male students, especially those with less feminist identities and orientations, and responding effectively to it is a challenge in feminist pedagogy. However, it is well documented that such resistance also is apparent among female students. As I shall note in more detail later, men's absence from the Women's Studies classroom does not guarantee egalitarian relations. In addition, while resistance to feminist teaching generally has been framed as a problem and a danger, at least one commentator notes that resistance also can have productive effects, for instance, in inspiring others in the classroom to be clearer and stronger in response and in promoting community among others (Moore 1998).

A more fundamental argument against male students' participation in WGS courses is the claim that, regardless of how they behave or how accepting they are of feminist thinking, the presence of any man diminishes the possibilities for feminist pedagogy. In particular, men's presence blocks the potential for consciousness-raising among female students: the potential to share, discuss, theorize and politicize their personal experience, and thus to "make the personal political." In the early second wave of feminism, consciousness-raising was an important element in the construction of feminist knowledge (Eisenstein 1984). Regardless of the actual behavior of men in a Women's Studies class, their mere presence may shape what female students are prepared to discuss (Mahoney 1983). It seems very likely, for example, that women are less likely in the presence of men to volunteer their experiences of such intimate experiences as rape or abortion.

On the other hand, consciousness-raising is increasingly marginalized as an aspect of the Women's Studies classroom. Teaching and learning methods which emphasize students' reflection, such as small group discussion of personal experience, diaries and journals, are relatively rare in contemporary Women's Studies courses. These shifts are unlikely to have been shaped significantly by men's growing numbers in Women's Studies, and more likely to reflect the depoliticizing influence of some forms of post-modernism and the problematization of "experience" and "consciousness." Early feminist notions of "experience" have been interrogated, as feminist scholars have begun to think about how experience and theory interact, and to question why they are thought of as separate entities (Robinson 1993). This does not mean that contemporary feminist pedagogies refuse to engage with women's personal experience. For example, some poststructuralist teaching methods invite women (and men) to reflect on the formation and negotiation of our gendered subjectivities, to critically examine the processes and discourses through which we are constituted as particular selves (Davies 1992, 1994).

While the benefits of single-sex versus mixed-sex classes have not been tested in Women's Studies, they have been tested in a related field, violence prevention education. The comparison is particularly relevant as much violence prevention education has been conducted among university-aged women and men and concerns "sensitive" topics of gender and sexuality. This field has offered a strong argument for the use of single-sex groupings, at least as part of one's education program: men

and women differ systematically in their involvements in gender and violence; they may be more comfortable and expressive in single-sex groups; working in single-sex groups can minimize harmful, gendered forms of interaction; and participants themselves prefer single-sex workshops. Scholarship on violence prevention education among men in particular tends to emphasize the need for male-only groups, to foster openness and critical reflection, address male–male peer influence, and craft roles in ending sexism and violence (Flood, Fergus, and Heenan 2009). On the other hand, mixed-sex groups create opportunities for dialogue between females and males; allow males to listen to females; can lessen the potential for male–male collusion with sexism; and can give women useful exposure to problematic male understandings and behaviors and valuable experience in challenging these or seeing them challenged.

Regardless of these contrasting rationales, however, which group composition is most effective? At least in relation to violence prevention, the evidence is mixed. Some analyses and meta-analyses find that separate-sex programs are more effective than mixed-sex programs, while other meta-analyses do not (Flood, Fergus, and Heenan 2009). There is some evidence that males rather than females may benefit in particular from mixed-sex education sessions, while changes in females' attitudes toward gender and violence are no greater in them. The most effective sex composition of groups may depend on such factors as the age of the group, the focus and goals of the teaching sessions, and the nature of the teaching methods used (Flood, Fergus, and Heenan 2009). Returning to the issue of men in WGS, mixed-sex classes may be more effective, for example, if the session is intended to encourage men's empathy for women or facilitate gender dialogue.

Men's absence from WGS classrooms does not resolve patterns of gendered interaction and resistance, for three reasons. First, resistance is evident too among female teachers. Second, women's socialized inclination to act as caretakers of men operates whether men are in the classroom or not. A different kind of "male presence" in the classroom is identified in some feminist accounts of female students' allegiance to "male-identified" ways of thinking, in which they ask, for example, "But what about men?" (Bright 1982; Doherty Turkel 1986). Third, there is more to power than gender. Power relations also operate along other axes of difference such as class, race, sexuality, personality, and indeed teacher/student, and classrooms are embedded in wider relations of dominance (Storrs and Mihelich 1998, 102). So the questions of who speaks, how they speak, and who is silenced are pertinent ones for WGS classrooms regardless of the sex of their participants.

### **Pedagogy for the Privileged**

There is every reason to think that men will continue to be a regular minority of students in Women's Studies classrooms. Crafting teaching strategies to respond effectively to this fact is one element in the wider project of creating just learning cultures and fostering transformative education. As a bare minimum, our teaching

must work to minimize gendered (and other) dynamics of power. However, a more ambitious agenda is increasingly prominent in contemporary, progressive discussions of pedagogy, in which men and other “privileged learners” are engaged in classrooms and enlisted as allies in struggles for social justice.

Men’s presence as students in the Women’s Studies classroom raises practical and political challenges. However, these challenges are not distinctive to the problematic of men in the feminist classroom but ubiquitous in a wide range of teaching and learning contexts. They are challenges in any situation where members of a privileged group are participating in education intended to undermine that privilege, whether white people learning about racism, heterosexual people learning about heterosexism, or people in general learning about forms of oppression in which they are complicit. An emergent “pedagogy for the privileged” identifies the particular dilemmas and learning processes which are shared across such contexts.

Pedagogical approaches oriented toward members of privileged groups go under various names—“pedagogy for the oppressor,” “education for the privileged,” and so on—and they are complemented by forms of scholarship focused on privilege, including Critical Masculinities Studies and Whiteness Studies. Like these, such pedagogies are overtly political, counter-hegemonic, and oriented toward social transformation (Curry-Stevens 2007). There is a political imperative for the transformation of privileged learners, as I have already outlined, and a practical imperative, in that educational practice routinely involves engagement with privileged learners (Curry-Stevens 2007).

Critical reflection and scholarship on educating men about gender in WGS classrooms is underdeveloped. Its pedagogical effectiveness will be best served by the use of three emerging bodies of practice and research: pedagogies for the privileged (largely in social work and community development contexts), university-based violence prevention education, and community-based, gender-focused education among men. Particularly in the last two, there is a rapidly developing body of experience and curricula, and substantial expertise in how best to change men’s attitudes, behaviors, and the wider social and power relations in which they engage. This work suggests, for example, that effective teaching practices will create safe spaces for men to talk and learn, be of sufficient intensity and depth to facilitate change, address not only cognitive domains but also affective and behavioral domains, be matched to men’s stage of change, anticipate and respond to resistance, and address the practical action men can take (Flood 2009, 2010).

### **Men as Agents of Feminist Scholarship**

While there is growing acceptance of men when they sit among other students in the WGS classroom, there is greater unease when they are standing up at the front. Certainly for the 1980s critics of male students, male teachers would have been unthinkable. And for 1990s feminist authors, this might have been seen as further evidence of the colonizing response to Women’s Studies represented by “Men’s Studies”

(Canaan and Griffin 1990; Hanmer 1990). Indeed, as Critical Masculinity Studies developed, its proponents argued that men should not take women's jobs in such fields (Hearn and Morgan 1990). Nevertheless, a small proportion of teachers in WGS courses are male. The proportion of gender-focused university courses taught by men is increasing, with the incorporation of gender-themed courses in "mainstream" disciplines such as Sociology and Psychology, the emergence of bodies of scholarship, and teaching focused on sexuality (including courses taught by gay, bisexual, and queer men), and the widespread shift from "Women's Studies" to "Gender Studies."

What is at stake then in men teaching Women's Studies? I highlight three sets of issues: gender inequalities and gendered evaluations of teaching in universities; teaching from shared social locations and experience; and claiming and articulating feminist knowledge. I conclude by commenting briefly on "pedagogy by the privileged."

The contexts for men's teaching of WGS are university institutions which are dominated by men. Gender inequalities benefitting men are pervasive in academic employment, in that men are overrepresented at the higher levels of universities, receive higher wages, and so on (Laube et al. 2007, 87). Academic Women's Studies has been one of the few academic spaces devoted to women's advancement and offering processes of academic mentoring and support for female faculty. It may be particularly galling for some feminist advocates, therefore, to see that men now share such space. Their numbers are likely to be small, given that, for example, the first male chair in Women's Studies in the United States was appointed only in 2005.<sup>3</sup>

One of the more subtle dimensions of gender inequality which shapes men's positions as teachers in WGS is gendered evaluations of men and women. In universities, as in other work contexts, people tend to discount women's skills and effort, are not comfortable with women in positions of power, and respond poorly to women who overstep their culturally assigned bounds (Laube et al. 2007, 91)

It is easier for men to live up to the expectations attached to their statuses as "man" and "professor"<sup>4</sup> than for women to live up to those attached to "woman" and "professor," as the overlap between the former is greater (Laube et al. 2007). Among students and others, a male professor is the unacknowledged norm (Abel and Meltzer 2007; Kimmel 1997). As various studies have demonstrated, this means that students evaluate male and female faculty in contrasting, gendered ways, and they are more likely to rate male than female professors as knowledgeable, professional, effective, and fair (Abel and Meltzer 2007). Male professors thus are "graded up," while their female counterparts are "graded down." (Other axes of social difference, such as those of race and ethnicity, also are influential throughout these processes.) Recent studies find that male students, or in other cases both male and female students, are more likely to rate professors in gender-stereotypic ways if they have traditional attitudes toward gender (Abel and Meltzer 2007). Students also may expect different behaviors and attributes from male and female staff, assuming, for example, that female professors will be more

available and give more personal time, and there is some evidence that professors themselves play out such stereotypes (Laube et al. 2007).

Male teachers' position is shaped too by the assumption that men are more objective and unbiased teachers than women in relation to teaching on gender in particular. Gendered patterns of evaluation play themselves out in particularly intense ways when professors are teaching about gender and gender inequalities, as is of course the case in WGS. Female academic teachers and their lecture material receive negative teaching evaluations when presenting information on gender inequalities (Abel and Meltzer 2007). In teaching WGS, female faculty often are assumed to be biased, antimale, and angry, and female staff who do not live up to students' gendered expectations receive hostile and punitive evaluations (Laube et al. 2007). In contrast, male teachers may be seen by students as "better feminists"—as less biased and more open-minded—and male feminists may be received in uncritically positive ways (Edwards 2008). Even in a study where students evaluated an identical written lecture (on workforce gender inequalities) by a female and male professor, they rated the male professor and his lecture more positively, including rating the lecture as more accurate and less "sexist." ("Sexist" here is likely to have meant "based on stereotypical and derogatory views of one sex (men)" rather than "supporting patriarchal inequalities.") Men with more traditional attitudes toward gender were more likely to rate the female professor as sexist, while men with liberal or progressive attitudes rated the professors' sexism equally (Abel and Meltzer 2007).

These findings have contradictory implications for evaluations of teaching in WGS classrooms. On the one hand, given that the content involves materials on gender inequalities, these gendered patterns of evaluation may be particularly pronounced, especially when being practiced by male students. On the other hand, given that the men in WGS typically have more progressive attitudes toward gender than other male students, such gendered evaluations may be less pronounced. In any case, there are obvious teaching strategies for male teachers to adopt in response: draw students' attention to the gendered dynamics of evaluation, work to disrupt them, and advocate institutional changes in the assessment and use of teaching performance.

A second set of issues concerns the fact that men teaching WGS can be seen as "teaching what they're not," to classes comprised largely of the other sex. Doing so raises issues of the teachers' speaking position and their ability to teach effectively. One argument against men teaching in Women's or Gender Studies rests on the premise that personal experience is the basis of feminist pedagogy, such that "only those who have experienced gender oppression have the knowledge and right to speak about it" (Storrs and Mihelich 1998, 103). However, this argument has been criticized as involving an essentialist "politics of experience." A politics of experience rests on universal notion of women's experience and ignores diversity; it often reduces one's complex identity into its most visible component; and this politics hides the relationality and fluidity between male/female, Black/White, and other dichotomously constructed identities and social relations (Storrs and Mihelich 1998).

Another key argument for female teachers in Women's Studies is that the development of rapport between them and female students enhances teaching effectiveness (Storrs and Mihelich 1998). Again, given the diversities constructed through multiple axes of social differentiation, being a woman does not inherently provide female teachers with insight into the lived experiences of all women or the ability to teach it (Storrs and Mihelich 1998).

Evidence from educational efforts among younger students, in primary and secondary schooling, also is relevant here. It suggests that, despite a widespread popular concern about the absence of "male role models" in schools and its impact on boys' education in particular, the sex of the teacher is less important than the quality of their teaching and the influence of a range of other factors. A large-scale UK study in primary schools found no indication that male teachers were more effective with boys, nor that female teachers were more effective with girls. It concludes that matching teachers and learners by sex is not warranted (Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell 2005). This suggests that there may be no problem *per se* with male teachers in WGS for students' educational performance. However, some studies also find that female teachers foster more positive attitudes toward education among students of both sexes and that female students report better relationships with female teachers (Carrington, Tymms, and Merrell 2005; Martin and Marsh 2005). Such research suggests that for men teaching in WGS, it is the quality of the pedagogies they use rather than their sex which will be critical in shaping students' outcomes.

At the same time, being a male teacher in WGS classrooms does bring both constraints and opportunities. It is problematic for men to teach about gendered oppression and marginality from a position of perceived, and actual, privilege. Teaching from privilege can reinscribe conventional, sexist hierarchies. For example, Edwards (2008) notes the pitfalls in a White man telling a roomful of smart young women that they are not as free or independent as they may think they are. While inviting students into a feminist questioning of male authority and experience, men also may ask implicitly that they trust and make exceptions for their male teacher (Edwards 2008). Male teachers are particularly ill-equipped to undermine pervasive and negative stereotypes of (female) feminists and feminism.

On the other hand, male teachers in WGS do have some advantages over female teachers, particularly for male students. The violence prevention field offers some arguments in support of male educators when working with boys and men: to model critical masculinities, to use an insiders' knowledge of masculinities to political advantage, because they tend to be perceived as more credible and more persuasive by male participants, and as an embodiment of men's responsibility for sexism and violence against women (Flood, Fergus, and Heenan 2009). (This field also argues for the benefits of male and female educators working in partnership.) For both female and male students, male teachers may be more able than female teachers to demonstrate and invite critical deconstructions of dominant masculinities. However, given that men are a minority of WGS students, such arguments are less compelling.

Related to the issue of “teaching from experience” is the issue of claims to knowledge. To teach feminist knowledge is simultaneously to lay a claim to owning that knowledge and having the right to deploy it (Breeze 2007). For male teachers in WGS, this position raises concerns about appropriation and colonization. As Edwards (2008) asks, at what point does a man teaching Women’s Studies become a mockery of feminism, an insidious form of ventriloquism?

When male university faculty teach feminist knowledge, on the one hand this can undercut (female) feminists’ claims to epistemological authority and the value of women’s voices. It can imply that feminist knowledge is legitimate only if voiced by men. In the wake of intrafeminist critiques of White and middle-class women’s “speaking for” others, men may be particularly reluctant to teach about women and gender. On the other hand, if men avoid ever teaching feminist knowledge, this evades their responsibilities to address gender and gender inequalities, and implies that the subject is not worth their time or attention (Schwyzer 2005). For men to retreat from ever speaking for others is to assume that their social locations are somehow unrelated to women’s, to protect themselves from the obligation to be true to women’s diverse experiences, and to diminish their political efficacy (Alcoff 1995).

When men teach feminist scholarship, just as when they produce it, they are working across difference. Similar issues are involved when White people write or teach about race, heterosexual people write or teach about sexuality and lesbians and gay men, and so on. This suggests that teaching in WGS and elsewhere inevitably involves questions of how to work across difference. Men’s relation to feminist knowledge is a problematic one, because of the characteristic constitution of masculine subjectivity and men’s standpoint, and masculine models of knowledge itself (Haraway 1988; Morgan 1992). Yet, a man’s profeminist or antipatriarchal standpoint is possible for the same reason that White antiracist or heterosexual antihomophobic standpoints are possible: because the experience of privileged groups generally is not so determining that the production of alternative forms of knowledge is impossible (Harding 1991).

Pedagogies by the privileged are more controversial, and far less well developed, than pedagogies for the privileged. But they are feasible. In-line with the responsibilities of members of any privileged social groups, men who teach WGS must critically interrogate their own social locations and work to resist and undermine the forms of injustice associated with these. Men must adopt traitorous social locations and identities. One way to do so is to “reinvent ourselves as Other,” in which those whose lives are constructed at the center of the social order learn about these lives by starting their thoughts from the perspective of lives at the margins (Harding 1991). Other desirable strategies for men teaching feminism include addressing one’s own gendered and speaking positions and practices (Stanovsky 1997), offering critical reflection on one’s own oppressive practice (Schacht 2000, 2001), highlighting and examining issues of students’ gendered participation (Alilunas, 2011), and teaching about resistance to feminism (Pleasant, 2011).

While pedagogies both for and by the privileged are still very much under development, they will be enriched by the lessons in practice emerging from activist work



among and by the privileged, in which members of privileged groups engage in ethical listening and dialogue across difference, become allies with oppressed groups, and forge coalitions against injustice (Pease, 2010). Again, while university-centered reflections on engaging men in feminist scholarship appear to be in their infancy, community-based educational efforts by and among men centered on violence prevention and antisexism provide detailed guidance regarding effective forms of teaching practice (Flood 2009, 2010).

Given just how little is known about male students and teachers of gender and sexuality in the university classroom, a desirable research agenda is readily apparent. Quantitative research into the profiles and trajectories of men in WGS and their impact of their involvement is needed. The latter ideally will show several features: the assessment of multiple dimensions of impact, from attitudes to activism; an attention to impact both for men themselves and for female students; and longitudinal and case-control design. Such quantitative research must be complemented into qualitative research into the experience, meaning, and negotiation of male students' and teachers' participation in feminist classrooms. In addition, while this essay has in some ways treated WGS as an unchanging field, such research must examine the significance for male students and teachers of shifts in feminist scholarship itself, notably the increased presence of scholarships addressing men and masculinities themselves, queer sexualities, and other dimensions of social difference.

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. Men's position as teachers is more controversial, and its overall impact on female and male students' educational and feminist development is unclear. Still, men can adopt traitorous gender identities and antipatriarchal standpoints, putting these to good use in the feminist classroom.

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### **Notes**

1. It would be possible to construct such a profile by going back through the data compiled on mixed-sex samples of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) students such as those used by Stake and her colleagues, but this has not been done thus far.

2. "Men in Women's Studies: The Mary Daly case," Accessed March 23, 2010. <http://userpages.umbc.edu/~korenman/wsmtdaly1>.
3. "Man Atop U. Washington Women's Studies Dept.," National Public Radio, August 1, 2005. Accessed January 12, 2010. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4780507>.
4. In North American usage, the term "professor" is used for any academic faculty member. In Australia on the other hand, the term denotes a particular, high rank of academic faculty. The North American usage is adopted here.

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### Bio

**Dr Michael Flood** is a sociologist at the University of Wollongong. His research focuses on the primary prevention of violence against women, men and gender, and young men's heterosexual relations. He is also an activist and educator with a long involvement in the prevention of men's violence against women.