Men in Feminism: A Self-Determination Perspective and Goals for the Future

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Men can make important contributions to gender equality, but a variety of obstacles impede their engagement with feminism. In this article, we propose a self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) approach to supporting men's feminist engagement. We argue that men are more likely to engage with feminism more consistently and effectively if they internalize feminist goals and incorporate them into their sense of self, that is, if they develop autonomous motivation. We argue further that men are more likely to develop autonomous motivation if their engagement with feminism satisfies basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. We suggest a variety of strategies to meet these needs, among them: framing feminism as a men's issue, considering men's viewpoints and values, portraying feminism as consistent with gender and masculine norms, encouraging positive interactions with feminist women, and presenting other feminist men as role models and mentors. According to bell hooks (1984), "sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole" (p. 81). Our article applies the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to encourage men to do so.

Public Significance Statement
Men have the potential to serve as powerful champions for feminist issues. There are various barriers to men's engagement with feminism. We propose a model, grounded in the self-determination theory, to support men's sustained feminist engagement and commitment.

In June of 2022, the Supreme Court ruled on the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. The court's decision overturned the foundational rulings in the cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey,* leaving women's reproductive health decisions up to state legislatures and opening doors to total and near-total abortion bans in states across America. *Dobbs* echoes a persistent theme across U.S. history: women's reproductive rights and rights to bodily autonomy are under attack. More broadly, the *Dobbs* decision is just one example of how sexism and sexist oppression harms women. So long as sexism persists, understanding how, when, and why men choose to leverage their power and privilege to support women is vital. In this article, we focus specifically on men's solidarity with and collective action for women's rights or feminism.

We use bell hooks's (2000) definition of feminism: "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." We recognize, however, that feminism has many forms (Henley et al., 1998; Ogletree et al., 2019; Simoni et al., 1999) and has gone through various "waves" over the last century. Modern intersectional feminism recognizes and appreciates that women's liberation is intimately intertwined with the liberation of other marginalized groups. We use the term *feminist men* or *ally men* or *men in feminism* to describe people who identify as men and who engage in collective action for gender equality. By collective action, we mean any behavior taken by an individual directed at improving the condition of members of a social group (Wright et al., 1990), including actions taken by members of advantaged social groups (i.e., men) to support members of disadvantaged groups (i.e., women; e.g., Radke et al., 2020; van Zomeren et al., 2012).

Given that many areas of life remain affected by sexism, there are various roles that men can play within the fight for gender equality (Sudkämper et al., 2020). In politics, men can support feminist initiatives, contact elected representatives, vote in support of gender equality initiatives, or donate to feminist causes. In the workplace, men can speak out against sexism, amplify women's contributions, and challenge sexist behavior (see Madsen et al., 2020). Men can also support gender equality in their romantic and platonic relationships; for example, by practicing feminist child rearing, dividing household labor and finances equitably, and confronting friends' sexism (Siegel et al., 2022).

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Men's engagement in feminism has real benefits for women. Men who oppose sexism increase feelings of identity safety among women in male-dominated contexts (Moser & Branscombe, 2022, 2023). They also produce more prejudice reduction and experience less backlash than women who confront sexism (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gervais & Hillard, 2014; Gulker et al., 2013). Feminism also has benefits for men. Sexist attitudes dictate expectations of masculinity that constrain men's ability to emotionally express themselves (Jakupcak et al., 2005) and are related to declines in men's physical health (Vandello et al., 2023) and higher risk of suicide (Cleary, 2012). It is therefore important to understand when men will be motivated to identify with feminists and engage in feminist action.

However, numerous obstacles impede men's motivation to identify with feminists and engage with feminism. Many men are unaware of the extent of gender inequality or the relationship between men's gender privilege and women's disadvantage (Swim et al., 2001). Therefore, they may not see the need for the feminist movement. Other men recognize gender inequality, but believe it is "not their place" to do something about it (Miller & Effron, 2010; Miller et al., 2009; Sherf et al., 2017) or that their support would not be appreciated (Birnbaum et al., 2024). Still other men see gender equality in zero-sum terms. They anticipate that gains in status for women will come at men's expense (Branscombe, 1998; Kehn & Ruthig, 2013; Ruthig et al., 2017; Stefaniak et al., 2020). These concerns are arguably most salient for men who identify strongly with their gender (Ellemers et al., 2002; Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986).

Men may also be reluctant to support feminism because they believe that doing so would violate in-group gender norms (e.g., Haines & Stroessner, 2019) or because they want to (or believe that they should) conform to masculine norms (Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Vandello et al., 2008). Men underestimate the degree to which other men support gender equality (De Souza & Schmader, 2022) and some men may be concerned that the femininity stigma associated with feminist men (V. N. Anderson, 2009; Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Burrows et al., 2023) and men who advocate for gender equality (Haines & Stroessner, 2019; Rudman et al., 2012, 2013) could be applied to them. Finally, given feminism's history of centering the concerns of the cisgender, straight, nondisabled, White middle-class women, it is also possible that some men may distance themselves from feminism to focus on social issues that they feel are more relevant to themselves and the women in their lives.

Despite these obstacles, many men do engage in feminist action. Qualitative research with men who identify as feminists reveals that men leverage their advantage to improve the lives of the women around them and women at large (Bojin, 2013; Siegel et al., 2022). Men's motivations for engaging in these behaviors are diverse. For some, feminist personal behaviors represent a reprieve from the demands and challenges of traditionally masculine norms. Other men are raised in households where feminist ideals are pervasive. Others still hold other marginalized identities that increase their awareness of other social issues and injustices (e.g., being gay; Siegel et al., 2022). Many men experience "turning points" (Siegel et al., 2022) throughout their lives that sharpen their feminist focus, such as learning that someone close to them has been victimized by sexual violence, taking a gender and women's studies class, or attending a social movement.

In this review, we apply the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017) to theorize the psychological process by which men internalize gender equality as a personal value or goal and integrate it into their sense of self, that is, develop *autonomous motivation* to engage in feminism. People who are autonomously motivated to engage in an activity are more likely to engage across time and context, even in the face of obstacles (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Men with autonomous motivation to engage in feminism may be more reliable allies to women. They may be more likely to persist on the path of feminist solidarity and activism and act in ways that prioritize women's identity-based needs over their own and exhibit identity growth over time, and they may be more likely to persist in their feminist behaviors even in the face of mixed feedback about their feminist engagement (Siegel et al., 2022). Indeed, women evaluate men who confront sexism more positively (Warren et al., 2022) and feel more identity safety around them (Moser et al., 2023) when they perceive that they act out of a sincere, or autonomous, motivation to support gender equality (see Moser & Wiley, 2024, for a review). Other men feel compelled to support gender equality to conform to local norms against prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Crandall et al., 2002) or by feelings of guilt or shame (Branscombe, 1998; Eckerle et al., 2023; Mallett & Swim, 2007; Schmitt et al., 2004). These *controlled motivations* can be useful in getting men to confront sexism at all, but they have their origins outside the self and are unlikely to sustain behavior in the absence of external (i.e., local norms) or internal (i.e., guilt or shame) punishments or rewards.

Based on SDT, we hypothesize that men internalize feminism as a personal value and integrate it into their sense of self to the extent that engaging in feminism satisfies their needs for autonomy (i.e., they engage freely and believe that they have a stake), relatedness (i.e., engaging in feminism will build meaningful connections to other men and other feminists), and competence (i.e., men feel like they can be useful in effecting change). This is not to say that feeling autonomy in one's choice to engage in feminism is the same as acting autonomously, without consideration for women's interests and perspectives or awareness of gender privilege. Nor is it to say that feeling a sense of belonging with feminist women means feeling a sense of unconditional acceptance or that feeling a sense of competence means receiving unending praise. Satisfying men's psychological needs does not mean absolving them from responsibility for ways they contribute to gender inequality and sexist oppression. Rather, men are more likely to develop autonomous motivation to engage in feminism when they see it as a personal choice that is consistent with their values, when they have meaningful connections with feminist women and other men that include honest criticisms, and when they feel that they have something to contribute to the cause. In theorizing *how* men internalize the motivation to engage with feminism, we hope our review will inspire future research and interventions to improve not only the quantity but also the quality of men's participation. We conclude this article with recommendations for future research leveraging this framework to support men's autonomous motivation to engage in gender-based collective action.

SDT and Men's Motivations to Support Feminism

According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), human motives vary not only in degree but also in quality. When

people believe that an activity would harm them, when they do not prioritize or value it, or when they feel unable to do it, people are not motivated to engage in the activity (i.e., amotivation). Conversely, when an activity unlocks people's basic capacity for exploration, mastery, or novelty, they are motivated to engage in it for its inherent pleasure (intrinsic motivation). Between the poles of amotivation and intrinsic motivation is a range of motivations that have their origins outside the self (extrinsic motivation). These motivations vary in the degree to which people internalize them and incorporate them into their sense of who they are. At the more external, or controlled, end of the spectrum, people engage in activities to gain rewards and avoid punishments (external regulation) or to increase feelings of self-esteem or avoid feelings of guilt (introjected regulation). At the more internal, or autonomous, end of the spectrum, people engage in activities because they connect to personal values (identified regulation) or reflect their sense of self (integrated regulation). Activities that are autonomously motivated increase feelings of authenticity and psychological well-being and are sustained over time, even in the face of obstacles.

SDT further posits that people are more likely to internalize engaging in an activity and incorporate it into their sense of self if engaging fulfills basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. People experience autonomy when they choose freely to engage in an activity and when it is consistent with their values. People experience relatedness when an activity sustains or increases their connections to valued individuals and groups. Finally, people experience competence when they are confident that they have the skills to succeed and when an activity is challenging but not overwhelming.

Researchers have applied SDT to a wide variety of topics and domains. Most relevant to the present review, researchers have applied the theory to collective action and intergroup helping (Thomas et al., 2017, 2019; Yip et al., 2024), integrating SDT with the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). According to the social identity approach, people define themselves, in part, based on the groups that they belong to and incorporate these groups into their sense of self. When people categorize themselves as group members, they think, feel, and act in accordance with the norms, values, and interests of the group, as represented by the group prototype. Consequently, social identification is a powerful predictor of collective action (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). People who identify more strongly with a group are more willing to take action to defend and affirm it (Branscombe et al., 2007).

Opinion-based groups are particularly strong predictors of collective action (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). These groups are defined by opposition to or support for a particular social issue and, as such, have clear norms for how group members should think, feel, and act (e.g., Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Feminists are one example of an opinion-based group (Wiley et al., 2013). While there is diversity in what it means to be a feminist, most definitions center opposition to sexism and support for gender equality. Among women, identifying strongly as a feminist predicts higher perceived sexism, more rejection of gender stereotypes, and greater support for collective action (Szymanski, 2004; van Breen et al., 2017; Yoder et al., 2011). Among men, solidarity with feminists—one component of identification (Leach et al., 2008) — is associated with more awareness of gender privilege and more

support for equality in public (i.e., in the workplace and in politics) and in private (i.e., in heterosexual partnerships; Wiley et al., 2013, 2021).

People's motivations to engage in collective action vary in degree and in quality. Many people are not motivated to engage in collective action at all. Those who *are* motivated to engage are unlikely to find it intrinsically rewarding; collective action often comes at a personal cost and is beset with defeats and disappointments. Most collective action is therefore likely to involve some form of extrinsic motivation. However, extrinsic motivation may be more or less internalized or incorporated into the self. People may engage in collective action for introjected, or controlled reasons; for example, they may engage because collective action reflects positively on themselves or a group they belong to (Radke et al., 2020) or out of feelings of guilt or shame (Branscombe, 1998; Eckerle et al., 2023; Mallett & Swim, 2007; Schmitt et al., 2003). Alternatively, people may engage in collective action for autonomous reasons; they may engage because collective action addresses important personal or group values (identified regulation) or affirms who people are as individuals or group members (integrated regulation; Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; van Zomeren et al., 2012).

Internalizing the motivation to engage in collective action on a particular issue can increase identification with opinion-based groups that are defined by support for the issue, making people more likely to sustain collective action over time (Yip et al., 2024). In a study of global antipoverty activists, for example, Yip et al. (2024) found that increases in autonomous motivation over the course of a year were associated with increases in identification with supporters of global policy as a group, and through identification, increases in collective action.[1] Consistent with SDT, Thomas et al. (2019) found that opinion-based identification increased to the extent that interacting with other group members fulfilled basic psychological needs. Thus, SDT can explain people's identification with and engagement in social movements. We apply this approach to men's identification with feminists and collective action to support gender equality.

According to SDT, men who have external or introjected motivation (i.e., controlled motivation) to engage in feminism—for example, those who act to conform to local antiprejudice norms or out of feelings of guilt or shame—only engage in feminism when they feel compelled to do so. This is consequential, first, because women are likely to be skeptical of men who may have external motives to engage in feminism or demonstrate feminist behaviors inconsistently (see also Burns & Granz, 2022, in the context of antiracism). For instance, men who self-identify as an ally yet fail to confront sexism are not perceived as sincere allies by women, and in fact, are viewed as negatively as men who endorse sexist attitudes (Moser et al., 2023). It is consequential, second, because men are unlikely to learn and grow as feminists without consistent engagement and sensitivity to the feedback they receive from women (Siegel et al., 2022). Learning about one's role in oppression can be a long and painful process requiring one to successfully regulate negative emotions, such as guilt and shame without distancing or disengaging (Ford et al., 2022; Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020).

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[1] They also found that increases in opinion-based identification were associated with increases in autonomous motivation; however, these increases in autonomous motivation were not associated with increases in collective action.

Controlled motivations may also cause men to engage in feminism in ways that are unwanted or counterproductive. Men who engage in feminism because it benefits themselves or their advantaged in-group, or out of feelings of guilt or shame, may act in ways that put their individual or group needs and interests ahead of women's interests and needs. For example, high-identifying members of advantaged groups sometimes help in ways that reinforce rather than challenge the status hierarchy (Nadler et al., 2009; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; see also Becker et al., 2019; Teixeira et al., 2020). Women view men's support for gender equality less favorably when men attempt to solve problems *for* women rather than support women in achieving their own goals (Wiley & Dunne, 2019), when they confront out of paternalistic duty to protect women (Estevan-Reina et al., 2021), exert too much influence within the movement (Iyer & Achia, 2021; Park et al., 2022), or employ an overbearing communication style (Radke et al., 2022). Likewise, group-based privilege can induce feelings of guilt or shame (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Iyer & Leach, 2008). This may lead some men to deny that they benefit from group-based privilege or distance themselves from it, even as they support gender equality (Iyer et al., 2007; Lickel et al., 2005; Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020). This is consequential as women view men who support gender equality but deny their gender privilege as less moral and are less willing to work with them toward gender equality (Wiley et al., 2024).
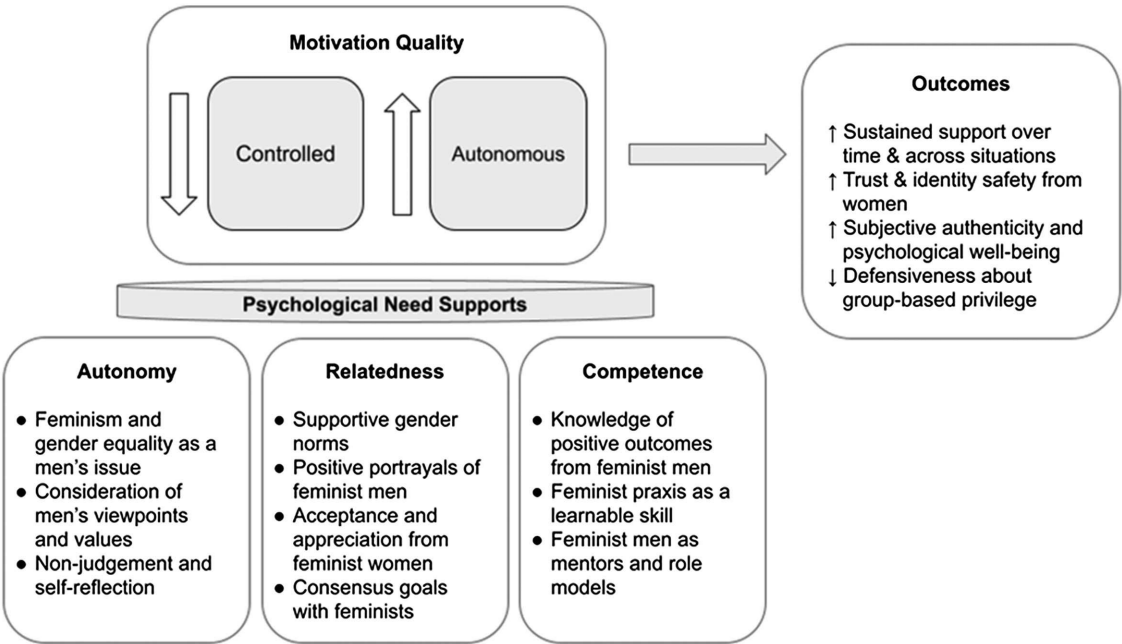
Taken together, some benefits of men's feminism and allyship depend not only on *whether* men are motivated to act but also on the *quality* of their motivation and whether women perceive it as moral (Wiley et al., 2024), sincere (Warren et al., 2022), trustworthy and reliable (Park et al., 2022), and intrinsically motivated (Burns & Granz, 2023; Chu & Ashburn-Nardo, 2022). To borrow language from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017), the benefits depend on women seeing men's engagement as motivation as autonomous rather than controlled.

In the following sections, we expand lessons from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to theorize factors that foster men's autonomous motivation to engage with feminism. We hypothesize that men are more likely to internalize their motivation to identify with feminists and support gender equality if they feel that they do so voluntarily (autonomy), that performing feminist action will facilitate meaningful connections with other men and other feminists (relatedness), and that they have the competence and efficacy to enact change (see Figure 1). Our model can provide a roadmap for future research on men's autonomous engagement in feminist activism.

Meeting Autonomy Needs

Instances where men feel that they are forced toward a feminist goal, such as through taking organizationally mandated diversity training or acting out of guilt, may inadvertently reduce feminist identification and spur psychological reactance (Rosenberg & Siegel, 2018). Indeed, people ironically expressed higher levels of implicit and explicit prejudice when people were primed with external motivations to control their prejudice compared to when people were primed with autonomous motivation (Legault et al., 2011). Fortunately, research has shown strategies to encourage autonomy. For instance, when information is provided explaining why someone should perform an action, people feel that they have more autonomy and control over an action (Ntoumanis et al., 2021). Similarly, acknowledging a person or group's wishes or perspectives makes people feel that they have more control over their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Taken together, reframing feminism as related to men's perspectives and daily choices should increase men's felt autonomy in identifying as a feminist and engaging in collective action.

Figure 1
Hypothesized Model to Increase the Quality of Men's Motivation to Support Feminism

Feminism as a Men's Issue

Men are more likely to experience autonomy by engaging in feminism if they believe it can benefit their gender in-group as well as women. Men are negatively impacted by gender inequality and benefit from many feminist goals and objectives (e.g., abortion access; Everett et al., 2019). For instance, strict gender roles and expectations of masculinity have been linked to negative mental and physical health outcomes for men (Vandello et al., 2023). Men also face structural disadvantages from sexism including lack of structures in place for paternal leave, even for men who are the primary caretakers of a child (Cox, 2021). When men acknowledge that they, too, have much to gain from feminist objectives, the threat of feminism to men's group status should be diminished. Moreover, viewing gender inequality as negatively impacting men shifts the emphasis to men's perspectives and outcomes associated with feminism. Such placement on men's interests should increase the extent to which gender inequality is viewed as personally relevant, which should, in turn, increase men's likelihood to voluntarily engage with feminism.

Consistent with this argument, Vázquez et al. (2024) found that highlighting the extent to which sexism negatively impacts men fosters men's intentions to participate in collective action toward gender equality. Likewise, men who are told that gender equality benefits women *and* men express more solidarity with feminists (Subašić et al., 2018). They are also more willing to engage in collective action for workplace gender equality and more likely to see workplace gender inequality as illegitimate, particularly when the message is delivered by another man (Subašić et al., 2018). In contrast, when gender inequality is framed as favoring women over men, men express less comfort with and endorsement of inequality, compared to when gender inequality is framed as favoring men (Schmitt et al., 2003). These findings indicate that men's attitudes toward gender inequality are moveable when the ways that men may be negatively impacted by sexism are made salient.

Value Affirmation

Another pathway through which men feel autonomy is to encourage men to view feminism as in line with their individual or group core values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Egalitarianism is a pervasive core value in the United States (Crandall et al., 2002), and the majority of men endorse the importance of equality efforts (Dennehy et al., 2018). When these values are threatened, people can react defensively and respond with higher levels of prejudice and discrimination (Sherman et al., 2017). Conversely, exercises that affirm men's individual or group moral values encourage men to act as allies for gender equality, particularly when the value aligns with feminist values. For example, affirming the self through writing about one's values can reduce negative attitudes toward out-groups and alleviate pressure to maintain a positive image of one's group (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

Nonjudgement and Self-Reflection

Conversations with men regarding feminism can also enhance autonomy. Conversations rooted in nonjudgement, empathy, and self-reflection can reduce defensive reactions when learning about harm perpetuated by an advantaged in-group (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). These supportive environments can signal to men that their viewpoints and consideration are heard (a component of autonomy, Ryan & Deci, 2017) and are likely to reduce shame and defensiveness regarding men's privilege (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). As evidence of this, people report lower anti-immigration and transphobic attitudes when speaking with someone who demonstrates nonjudgmental listening (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Kalla & Broockman, 2020). Talking with men in ways that signal nonjudgement and men's viewpoints may reduce shame and elicit more self-reflection from men than conversations that place the blame of gender inequality on men. Moreover, these supportive environments may allow men to move past prototypical conceptions of feminism that center White women to a more inclusive understanding of feminism. Having open discussions regarding the unique ways that sexism impacts women of color or sexual minority women may lead men to practice intersectional feminism. We do not mean to imply, however, that it is women's responsibility to provide patient and nonjudgmental spaces for men as this places an additional burden on women. Rather, we recommend that nonjudgmental listening and self-reflection may be most appropriate in conversations with other men who are further along in their feminist development. In these spaces, men may feel more comfortable having frank conversations regarding their potential blind spots or misperceptions of feminism. Moreover, they may feel less external pressure to identify as a feminist, which enhances their autonomy (see the Feminist Men as Mentors and Role Models section below for a discussion).

Meeting Relatedness Needs

Relatedness to With Other Men

Strategies that frame feminism as *normative for men*'s masculinity and that *counter negative stereotypes* of feminist men should meet the basic psychological need of relatedness, leading men to feel more connected with both their gender in-group and the feminist movement at the same time. Men are resistant to gender equality to the extent they think it might damage their standing among other men, diminishing their sense of belonging within a valued in-group. De Souza and Schmader (2022) tested whether believing that other men do not see sexism as a problem (i.e., pluralistic ignorance) drives men's unwillingness to engage in feminist allyship in order to avoid social sanction. Across three studies, results suggested that men and women underestimate men's concern about sexism in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics contexts, and this is particularly true for men high in precarious masculinity concerns (i.e., they fear that others' perception of their masculinity may be contingent upon their consistent demonstration of stereotypically masculine behaviors). This misperception of men's concerns over sexism drove lower allyship intentions. Men similarly underestimate how much other men value communal traits and roles, which are proscribed for men and normative for women (Van Grootel et al., 2018). Informing men that other men support communal roles and values causes men to incorporate communal traits into their self-concept and support gender equality (Van Grootel et al., 2018).

More generally, people are motivated to align their behavior with social norms (Miller & Prentice, 1996; Tankard & Paluck, 2016), particularly when a norm is perceived to align with a groups' goals and values (Burkley & Blanton, 2008; Pagliaro et al., 2011).

Although norms are extrinsic motivators in nature, norms may be internalized when they come to be held as moral values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Framing feminism as normative and consistent with men's in-group values should increase the extent to which men identify with feminists and encourage men's allyship behaviors. By engaging in behaviors that align with both men's and feminist's group values, men are likely to feel more connected and have a greater sense of belonging within the feminist movement.

Negative stereotypes regarding feminist men also discourage men's involvement in feminism by situating feminist men as *feminine* men (V. N. Anderson, 2009; Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Burrows et al., 2023; Rudman et al., 2013) and thus counter to the prototype of masculinity. Challenging the negative stereotypes of feminist men (e.g., providing examples and role models of masculine feminist men) helps to overcome men's concerns about their sense of belonging and status within their advantaged in-group posed by stigma and masculine norms. Exposing men to more positive representations of feminists makes men more willing to identify with the group and engage in collective action to support gender equality (Wiley et al., 2013). Interventions that challenge hegemonic understandings of masculinity and frame feminist involvement as compatible with a healthier masculinity, such as Australia's White Ribbon Campaign (Jordan, 2019), may be effective at reducing the potential sense of masculinity threat from feminist engagement as well.

Relatedness With Other Feminists

Men are unlikely to internalize feminist values and incorporate them into their sense of self if they believe that other feminists will not accept them. Men are typically under the misconception that feminist women dislike men, a false belief known as the *misandry myth* (V. N. Anderson, 2009; Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024). In fact, feminist women's attitudes toward men are broadly similar to attitudes toward men among other social groups. This may lead men to believe, falsely, that their efforts would be rejected by feminist women were they to join the feminist movement, threatening their relatedness needs. Similarly, men from advantaged racial groups (i.e., White men) underestimate how much women appreciate men's allyship (Birnbaum et al., 2024), inhibiting men's engagement.

Feeling welcomed, supported, accepted, and appreciated by feminist women may correct men's misperceptions and increase men's feminist identification by fulfilling their relatedness needs. Consistent with this perspective, Wiley et al. (2021) found both cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence that heterosexual men who reported that they felt accepted in their interactions with feminist women reported greater solidarity with feminists (see also Vázquez et al., 2021). In addition, White men's intentions to engage in allyship also increases when they hear testimonials of women who are appreciative of men's allyship (Birnbaum et al., 2024). To the extent that feeling supported, welcomed, accepted, and appreciated increases relatedness needs, it may also make men more likely to internalize their allyship as a personal value and incorporate it into their sense of self.

Research with other opinion-based groups suggests that reaching consensus about priorities and tactics for action on a social issue in discussions with other group members can increase the degree to which people identify with the group and support action for social change (Thomas et al., 2019). Thomas et al. (2019) found that consensus fulfills people's relatedness needs, facilitating the internalization of their motives and the integration of their motives into their sense of self. The same may be true in men's discussions with other feminists. To the degree that men reach consensus with other feminists about the problems with sexism and what to do about it, they may feel more connected to the group, leading them to internalize their motives for feminist action and identify more strongly with feminists. These interactions can happen in a variety of settings, including classrooms, nonprofits, and community groups.

While feeling accepted, welcomed, supported, and appreciated by feminist women and reaching consensus with feminists satisfy men's relatedness needs and encourage them to internalize their motivation to identify with feminists engaged with feminism, it is not feminist women's responsibility to make men feel welcome or to agree with men, adding emotional labor on top of gendered oppression (see Ahmed, 2010, 2017). Intergroup contact is a two-way street. Men have control over their own behavior and whether they act in ways the feminist women are likely to support and accept. Given men's relatively low expectations of how they would be received by feminist women and feminist women's generally positive attitudes toward men—especially men who support gender equality—it is likely that men who engage in nearly any contact with feminist women will find it more positive than they expect it to be.

Some women may choose to do the labor of welcoming and supporting feminist men; but it should be a choice, not an expectation. Women have good reasons for not trusting men immediately. Men are likely to make mistakes and disappoint as they learn and grow. Men who are further along in their feminist development can also shoulder some responsibility of satisfying the relatedness needs of emerging feminist men.

Meeting Competence Needs

Increasing Efficacy and Gaining Feminist Skills

Men are unlikely to internalize the motivation to engage with feminism if they do not feel efficacious in performing these actions (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Feminist men can mobilize other men to join the cause (Subašić et al., 2018), set norms of gender equality within organizations (Moser & Branscombe, 2023), and signal identity safety (Moser & Branscombe, 2022; Pietri et al., 2018) and confidence (Cihangir et al., 2014) to women in historically exclusionary spaces. However, many men may not be aware of the positive impact that their presence can have on gender equality movements and interpersonal interactions with women or may feel rejected from feminist spaces when called out for errors (see Siegel et al., 2022). This decreases the likelihood of meeting men's motivational need to feel competent and efficacious in their actions toward gender equality. As such, increasing the extent to which men feel that they have the necessary competency to promote prosocial change toward gender equality may improve men's likelihood of engaging with feminism and persisting in the face of challenges that may arise. For instance, men who are shown narrative videos of sexism report greater awareness of gender bias (Moss-Racusin et al., 2018), gender bias literacy (Pietri et al., 2017), and stronger intentions of taking steps to advance women (Moss-Racusin et al., 2018). Interventions that make men aware of ways that they can

promote feminist goals should meet the need for competence and reduce uncertainty regarding whether and how to act. When men feel that they have the necessary tools to reduce gender bias, they may be more likely to view themselves as "having a place" within the feminist movement.

Rather than providing general recommendations to support women, interventions can provide specific examples of times to intervene, speak up, or ask questions. Moreover, these trainings and interventions ought to speak to the ways that patriarchy, White supremacy, and heteronormativity interact to produce unique forms of sexism toward multiply marginalized women. Understanding how women's various identities can shift the way that they experience sexism should increase men's competencies in recognizing and combating sexism for all women. These interventions can also provide opportunities for putting these skills into practice, apologizing when these efforts are not received positively, and correcting course. For example, bystander intervention programs are generally effective at changing attitudes toward sexual assault and increasing prosocial behavior using active learning strategies (Mujal et al., 2021). Giving men safe opportunities to practice feminist action, without fear of judgment or backlash and while receiving positive feedback, may help to meet men's competence needs.

Feminist Men as Mentors and Role Models

Men may also gain the competencies necessary to autonomously engage with feminism through exposure to and interactions with feminist role models. Role models have the power to inspire others to act in ways that align with values, particularly when someone identifies strongly with the role model (Morgenroth et al., 2015). As in-group members are more likely to be influential, at least among higher identifiers (Turner, 1991), feminist men represent a strong candidate for feminist role models. Consequently, viewing other men living feminist lives may demonstrate to men that it is attainable to enact feminist values throughout their day-to-day lives. These role models may demonstrate actionable feminist behaviors to men who may otherwise be uncertain of how to act on egalitarian principles. Importantly, theorizing on the power of role models has indicated that people need not directly interact with role models to be inspired (Dasgupta, 2011; Morgenroth et al., 2015; Pietri et al., 2021). Rather, viewing attainable role models in the media and leadership positions should lead men to feel more competent in displaying feminist actions.

In a workplace setting, men were more likely to intend to be allies for gender equality when a leader endorsed gender equality allyship, particularly when they identified strongly with the leader (Lyubykh et al., 2024). Importantly, this work indicates that the quality of a role model's motivations impacts the extent to which men may identify with and be inspired by the role model. Men were less likely to identify with the leader when the leader was perceived to be performatively motivated to be a gender equality ally (Lyubykh et al., 2024).

Men who already identify as feminists may also act as mentors to men interested in the feminist cause. These mentors can act as role models but also may take a more direct role in fostering men's identification with feminism. These men likely have gone through the process of feminist identification and are well aware of the common blunders and setbacks that men may face, and they may also be more lenient and accepting of men's mistakes (Siegel et al., 2022).

Feminist men may therefore guide other men through this process. They may create nonjudgmental spaces wherein men may feel comfortable discussing their potential blind spots and asking questions toward gaining the necessary competence to identify as a feminist.

Further Considerations

Feminism is a nuanced and multifaceted movement that aims to improve the lives of women with various racial backgrounds, sexual identities, socioeconomic statuses, and beyond. This is worth noting as the prototype of women is a White woman (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), making it plausible that interventions aimed to help women may disproportionately aid White women. This leads to intersectional invisibility, wherein multiply marginalized women, particularly women of color, slip through the cracks within social movements by virtue of being nonprototypical of their gender or racial group memberships. Strategies to encourage men's feminist identification must highlight the way that intersecting identities such as race, sexual orientation, class, ability, and more impact women's lives so that men may be feminist allies for all (Pietri et al., 2024).

Moreover, feminism is not a movement intended only for cisgender women. Interventions to bring in men to the feminist movement must include trans women within their definition of feminism. Trans exclusionary radical feminists, an extremist subset of feminists, view trans women as a threat to girls, women, and the meaning of womanhood. Ironically, antitrans rhetoric that is ostensibly protective of women is motivated by belief systems that hurt women. A recent review found that the influx of antitrans legislation attempting to prohibit trans women in predominantly cisgender women spaces (ex. women's sports and bathrooms) is motivated by gender essentialist and benevolent sexist views (Atwood et al., 2024). These very belief systems are antithetical to feminist goals and serve to maintain the current gender hierarchy.

Gendered oppression is not due solely to individual men and is unlikely to be entirely eradicated through changing individual hearts and minds. It is reinforced through cultural structures that permeate many aspects of life. Increasing men's participation in feminism and the quality of men's motivations to participate in feminism are a step toward eradicating sexism. Feminist men must go beyond identification with the movement to taking action to dismantle oppressive systems. By encouraging men to internalize their motivation to support feminism, we argue that men will become more reliable and effective allies in the long-term struggle to dismantle sexist oppression.

Limitations

Men are not a monolith and simultaneously hold advantaged and disadvantaged group memberships. Because people with disadvantaged group memberships are more vigilant for and attuned to noticing bias toward their group (Murphy et al., 2007), it is possible that men with intersecting disadvantaged group memberships may be less hindered by the barriers to feminism. Future research should examine how highlighting the interconnected nature of different systems of oppression may increase feminist identification among marginalized men. Women may also more readily accept feminist men with disadvantaged identities because salient similar experiences of discrimination can lead disadvantaged group members to

categorize an out-group member with a disadvantaged identity as an in-group member (Craig & Richeson, 2012). Similarly, people who hold marginalized group memberships are often assumed to be in solidarity with other disadvantaged groups (Saguy et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2024). Future research ought to examine the accuracy of these perceptions to better understand when solidarity between disadvantaged groups is most likely to occur.

Another limitation is that the research reviewed here has largely been conducted within Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic contexts. It is possible that the barriers outlined in this review may be unique to these contexts. In particular, there is an overrepresentation of White participants in psychological research, and we stress that a comprehensive understanding of feminism must be inclusive of people of all racial backgrounds. We urge more research with diverse samples as we develop a more nuanced understanding of these social phenomena. Relatedly, the bulk of the work we cite here was conducted in the United States, Canada, and Western European countries, countries in which gender equality is more central to social organization (though, of course, these countries are not without need for further feminist action). There may be more barriers to men's feminist engagement in countries with higher gender segregation and traditional imbalanced laws regarding gender. Furthermore, countries with more repressive governments may have more material and tangible threats, including harm to oneself, potentially increasing barriers. Future research should consider strategies to encourage men's feminist involvement in such contexts.

Next Steps

We hope that our application of SDT to men's engagement in feminism will inspire basic research and novel interventions to encourage men to internalize the motives to engage with feminism and incorporate them into their sense of self. Most studies have examined men's engagement with feminism over short time spans (e.g., a brief experimental study). Future research should examine men's motivation and engagement in feminism over time and across situations. Men who have more autonomous motivation to engage with feminism should persist, even in the face of obstacles, whereas men with more controlled motivation should engage inconsistently. In addition, some men's feminist identity development may be gradual (see Siegel et al., 2022). Men who begin their feminist journeys with controlled motivation may develop autonomous motivation over time if their engagement with feminism satisfies needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Researchers should also examine women's perceptions of men's behaviors and the quality of their motives. It is an open question as to whether women are able to distinguish between men's autonomous and controlled motivation to engage with feminism. When women are made aware that men have ulterior motives for feminist engagement, women discount offers of allyship (Moser et al., 2023). When these motives are unknown or ambiguous, we expect that women will attribute more controlled motivation to men who engage with feminism inconsistently over time or only in certain situations (Moser & Wiley, 2024). It may be important to understand the contexts in which the quality of motivation does and does not matter. One-off situations (e.g., attending a protest, voting in a single election) may not necessitate the same degree of autonomous motivation in order to

be perceived positively by feminist women as longer term engagement (e.g., supporting women colleagues at work).

Most importantly, this model opens doors to identify real-world interventions to satisfy men's need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence and improve the quality of their motivation. Some interventions already exist to support men's understanding of feminist issues, such as the Workshop Activity for Gender Equity Simulation (Cundiff et al., 2022). However, new interventions can be developed to support men's autonomy, relatedness, and competence. For example, interventionists may wish to leverage the social norms theory (Legros & Cislaghi, 2020) to correct inaccurate perceptions of women's and attitudes about men and male feminists. Alternatively, interventionists may wish to increase men's competence to engage with feminist activism by providing concrete examples of how they can intervene and engage in collective action, potentially drawing from the bystander intervention literature (Fischer et al., 2011).

Structural and cultural interventions that allow men to support their egalitarian values without fear of social sanction or failure are likely to have the broadest impact on the quality of men's motivation to support gender equality. In organizational settings, for example, surveying women about the allyship behaviors they want from men and sharing the anonymous results in an open, nonjudgmental way may increase men's feelings of competence in performing allyship and relatedness with their colleagues (Birnbaum et al., 2024). In educational settings, sharing examples of men who have acted to support gender equality at personal cost (i.e., in-group moral exemplars; Čehajić-Clancy & Olsson, 2024) may increase feelings of relatedness, because they portray men's support for equality as normative, and competence, because they present men with a feminist role model. In parenting, fathers in different-sex couples are more likely to take parental leave in contexts where some portion of leave is reserved for them (e.g., Sweden; Duvander & Cedstrand, 2022). Fathers who do take leave participate more in child care and household labor over time and endorse more egalitarian gender norms (Schober & Büchau, 2022). This may be in part because these policies increase men's autonomy, by making it financially possible for men to spend more time with their children (Livingston, 2018); relatedness, by reducing the stigma for taking leave and building men's connections to their partners and children; and competence, by giving men the opportunity to excel at parenting and domestic labor. These are just a few examples.

Conclusion

Men have an important role to play in the feminist movement, yet they face numerous obstacles to feminist engagement. Men who persist in their engagement have a greater chance to support positive change, both in society at large and within their own feminist practice as they learn and grow. Drawing on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), we have emphasized that men are more likely to persist when they internalize an autonomous motivation to support gender equality. This motivation is more likely to develop when men perceive that they can meet their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence by engaging with the feminist movement. As the fight for gender equality continues, people of all genders and social statuses will need to come together to join "the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000, p. viii).

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