

Straight/Strait Jackets for Masculinity: Educating for “Real” Men

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ABSTRACT

Although much research in gender and education has been done over the past twenty years in Canada, very little attention has been paid to the way in which schooling produces and reproduces heterosexual masculinity and legitimates the existing relations among men in the society. The sources that we have had for understanding young men's lives have largely been the writings of “experts”; the accounts of the lives of young men have continually patterned themselves after a theorizing which stresses that history is made “behind their backs.” In this article, we hear the voices of fourteen male high school students, interviewed twice during 1988-89 when they were between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. Through their voices, these students become the experts in describing their practice, their history in the making — indeed, what it means to be a young man.

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que l'on ait fait beaucoup de recherches sur le sexe et l'éducation au cours des vingt dernières années au Canada, on s'est penché très peu sur la façon dont les écoles produisent et reproduisent la masculinité hétérosexuelle et permettent de légitimer les relations existantes parmi les hommes dans la société. Les sources à notre disposition pour comprendre les vies des jeunes hommes ont été en grande partie les écrits des «experts»; les comptes rendus des vies des jeunes hommes se sont toujours modelés sur une théorie selon laquelle l'histoire se fait «derrière leur dos». Dans l'article suivant, nous pouvons lire les paroles de quatorze jeunes hommes de l'école secondaire âgés de seize à dix-neuf ans qui ont été interviewés à deux reprises en 1988-89. En s'exprimant, ces étudiants deviennent les experts en décrivant leurs habitudes, leur propres «histoires» et, en fait, ce que signifie le fait d'être un jeune homme.

As we grew into adolescence we were faced with the terrors of junior high. Age twelve brought rules for how to walk and carry books. Athletics loomed larger. Got to want to kill the other team. Natural curiosity about what was happening to other boys' bodies led to downturned eyes in the shower lest our wonderings be discovered. There were rules to be followed in order to be a man, but the rules were confusing.

(Beane, 1990, pp. 158-159)

Introduction

FEMINIST SCHOLARS HAVE BEEN MAKING visible for some years the gendered and sexed nature of the practice of schooling through an analysis of teacher pedagogy, curriculum content, hiring practices, role models and so on; however, it has been only recently that men's lives and masculinity, including their sexualities, have become a topic for investigation, exploration, analysis and debate (Firestone, 1975; Komarovsky, 1976; Tolson, 1977; Dubbert, 1979; Grady, Brannon & Pleck, 1979; Pleck, 1980; Brod, 1987; Connell, 1987; Kaufman, 1987; Brittain, 1989; Messner, 1990a, 1990b). Within this literature on men's lives, there is very little that has been said in the Canadian context on young men, masculinity and sexuality in the context of schooling. Even within the more recent feminist and "queer" theorizing, very little has been said *by men* themselves about their gender obedience to hegemonic masculinity and their compulsion with heterosexuality. By hegemonic masculinity, I mean those actual and perceived practices of men that give them power, authority and privilege over others: heterosexuality, misogyny, heterosexism and homophobia, physical size and bodily strength, and competition and violence in a variety of forms (Messner, 1990a). It is both a question of how any one man, particular groups of men, and men in general, come to be in positions of power, authority and privilege, as well as how they produce, make legitimate and reproduce the personal, social, economic, and political relationships that create and generate that power and privilege (Connell, 1987). As a collective process, gender obedience by men to hegemonic masculinity expresses themes of competition with other men, subordination of women and other men, violence toward women and other men, and heterosexism and homophobia. Quite simply, then, I want to

argue that heterosexual hegemonic masculinity is socially constructed and socially imposed and that schools are implemented in the process of maintaining heterosexual and masculine privilege.

Indeed, little analysis has been done on how masculinity and heterosexuality weave themselves through the most ordinary of our daily routines, including those in schooling, and how they saturate our consciousness so that heterosexist and homophobic ideas about the essentialist nature and naturalness of both masculinity and heterosexuality dominate and prevail (Connell, 1989a).

If we are to expand our gender and sexual theorizing, we must begin to provide a much more detailed account of heterosexuality and its relationship to masculinity, while at the same time problematizing both concepts to make visible their social and political nature, for neither heterosexuality nor masculinity are biological or neutral (Connell, 1987; Kaufman, 1987; Brittain, 1989; Messner, 1990a). Rather, both are social accomplishments of a political nature located within a larger set of political, economic and social relations (Frank, 1987). Gender obedience to heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity is a human activity, a social product embodied by both the individual and the collective of men in their everyday, routine set of social relations. We must remember, for example, that the "faggot" jokes, the name-calling, and the physical and psychological abuse of lesbian and gay students and teachers on a daily basis in schools are not merely "a matter of backward attitudes" (Kinsman, 1987a). In a country that prizes rugged individualism, these are often seen as "incidental moments," unconnected to the larger set of practices which assist in the construction of a

daily gender and sexual reality — a reality interpreted through what are considered to be expert sources (i.e., teachers, coaches, police, policy booklets, sex education pamphlets, and so on). This “reality” confirms the dominant interpretation of gender and sexual relations, producing heterosexuality as normal and good, and gay and lesbian sex as abnormal, deviant and sick (Kinsman, 1987b).

Sexuality and masculinity are grounded in the social practices of institutions and their agents where a gender and sexual regime is imposed, encouraging particular forms of masculinity and sexuality while discouraging others.

The family, school, sports, friends, church, clubs, scouts, jobs, and the media all play a role as the adolescent struggles to put the final touches on himself [his body] as a real man. (Kaufman, 1987, p. 12)

Gay and lesbian students and teachers know both the energy it takes to “pass” as a “non-queer” in their ordinary routine activities of the day, as well as the fear and “cost” of being found out. Even those gay men and lesbians who are politically experienced and openly challenge other forms of social terrorism and oppression in schools, such as sexism and racism, often spend the entirety of their professional careers in the “school-closet.”

As Kinsman (1987b) says in “Men Loving Men: The Challenge of Gay Liberation”:

In our society, heterosexuality as an institutionalized norm has become an important means of social regulation, enforced by laws, police practices, family and social policies, school and the mass media. (p. 104)

A Study: Young Men and Masculinity

In 1988 and 1989, I conducted a study, *Everyday Masculinities* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1990), with fourteen young men in a high school. Increasingly upset by the sexism and the heterosexism, along with the other institutionalized forms of social terrorism that were part of the daily landscape of schools, I decided to investigate what I had come to see not only as the acceptance, but the celebration, of gender and sex relations that privileged some and harmed others.

In order to begin to understand what was happening with young men and their masculine practice, two rounds of in-depth interviews were carried out with the fourteen boys. In this article, through their voices, we hear the description of what it means to be a young man. As much as is possible, it is their talk that I have attempted to represent. Through this talk, it is practice, their history in the making, that we hear. The everyday realities of young men are explored as diverse and complex practices in which young men negotiate relationships and experience struggles full of tension and contradiction in order to accomplish their daily lives, inside and outside of schools.

As men we learn to maintain control in whatever situation we are in. This means holding our bodies in a particular way — blowing out our chests and keeping our bums tight. This is what we take to be a masculine measure of strength. We assume that power is a clenched fist rather than to experience a whole range of feelings and emotions. (Seidler, 1989, p. 148)

Each boy, like most men, was well aware of where he stood in relation to the social

scale of masculine measurement used by these boys and men in general. The boys were well aware of the freedom and privilege that is gained from the practising of a masculinity which is, or appears to be, heterosexual, misogynist, sexist and heterosexist. As well, they knew exactly what they had to lose if they did not engage in the practices that brought privilege.

There is much that could be said and debated about the study's method and methodology (Kimmel, 1987; Messner, 1990b). For my purposes here, I simply want to say that the data from the study is not generalizable to all boys or all schools. *Everyday Masculinities* does not tell it all. The boys were all from one school. They were all in the academic stream. All of them were white and anglophone, and most were from economically secure households. None had been labelled physically or mentally challenged. What *Everyday Masculinities* does is share the individual and collective practice of masculinity in the lives of fourteen young men at a particular point in the history of that practice, as well as in the larger configuration of all men's historical practice of masculinity.

However, the glimpse of those fourteen lives that this article provides will no doubt receive a "knowing nod" from many who have worked in schools, especially from the men who have found, or continue to find, themselves in the margins of hegemonic masculinity.

Most men feel the presence of violence in their lives. Some of us had fathers who were domineering, rough, or even brutal. All of us had experiences of being beaten up or picked on when we were young. We learned to fight or we learned to run; we learned to pick on others, or we learned to talk or joke our way out of a

confrontation. But either way, these early experiences of violence caused an incredible amount of anxiety and required a huge amount of energy to resolve. That anxiety crystallized in an unspoken fear: all other men are my potential humiliators, my enemies, my competitors. (Kaufman, 1987, p. 18)

I wanted to talk directly with young men about masculinity and sexuality. I had been concerned for many years that the sources for understanding young men's lives had largely been the writings of "experts," and that the accounts of the lives of young men had continually patterned themselves after a theorizing which stresses that history is made "behind their backs." The idea that young men make their history, including its constraints, has often been neglected. This continues to produce a view of young men as the passive receivers of a monolithic social system through a process which is seen to be mechanical and consensual. This way of theorizing lives gives little respect for human agency, including the resistance to the hegemony which is so important for social change, individually and collectively.

Through their voices, we hear that their process of struggle around sexuality involved the struggle for and against what it means to be masculine, often by the same boy, not just in their relationships with young women, but with their relations with other men: at school, at home, in the playing fields, at the dance, simply walking down the street, going to the school washroom, and putting up their hand in class to answer a question. Within this struggle, the power relations among the boys — those relations of privilege and the subordination — got defined and re-defined, formed and re-formed, shaped and re-shaped, in any and all situations in which they found themselves.

Boys grow up to be wary of each other. We are taught to compete with one another at school, and to struggle to prove ourselves outside of it, on the street, the playground and the playing field. Later, we fight for status over sexual prowess, or money, or physical strength, or technical know-how. We fear to admit our weaknesses to one another, to admit our failures, our vulnerability, and we fear being called a sissy, a wet or a softy. The pressure is on to act tough. We fear humiliation or exclusion, or ultimately the violence of other boys if we fail to conform. (Morrison & Eardly, 1985, p. 107)

Heterosexual Privilege

As boys, we have to be constantly on the alert to either confront or avoid physical violence. We have to be ready to defend ourselves. We are constantly on our guard with our speech and our bodies.... Masculinity is never something we can feel at ease with. It is always something we have to be ready to prove and defend. (Seidler, 1980, p. 23)

In this section, through their own voices, the fourteen boys allow us glimpses into their lives which enable us to investigate and unravel the interplay and the interconnections of the practices that continually constitute and reconstitute sexuality. Their talk uncovers the anxiety, the joy, the hurt, the celebration, the fear, the resistance and the struggle around sexuality. In short, the *human agency* of male sexuality within the everyday experiences of these young men is clearly visible.

The physical sense of maleness is not a simple thing. It involves size and shape, habits of posture and movement, particular physical skills and the lack of others, the image of one's own body, the way it is presented to other people and the way

they respond to it, the way it operates at work and in sexual relations. In no sense is all of this a consequence of XY chromosomes, or even of the possession on which discussions of masculinity have so lovingly dwelt, the penis. The physical sense of maleness grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history-in-society. (Connell, 1987, p. 84)

In the corridors, the classrooms, the sports arena, their family lives and their relationships with each other and with young women, sexuality was always present. The conversations make visible the freedom, the restrictions and the regulations, both formal and informal, that assist in governing their sexuality in a multiplicity of ways.

However, a constant weave throughout their conversation and their daily practice was the social power that those who appeared to be heterosexual young men exerted by virtue of their social privilege.

What makes heterosexuality work is heterosexual privilege, and if you don't have a sense of what privilege is, I suggest that you go home and announce to everybody that you know — a roommate, your family, the people you work with — everywhere that you go, that you're a queer. Try being a queer for a week. (Bunch, 1975, p. 105).

Heterosexism, that taken-for-grantedness that all people are heterosexual, and heterosexual privilege, that material and social power and thus privilege that comes with being a heterosexual or "passing" as one, was present in their lives at each and every level of their experience, from the most intimate and personal practices of their sexuality to the practices of the medical and guidance personnel within the school (Frank, 1987). As Freud (1977) wrote:

The requirement that there shall be a single kind of sexual life for everyone disregards the dissimilarities, whether innate or acquired, in the sexual constitution of human beings; it cuts off a fair number of them from sexual enjoyment, and so becomes the source of serious injustice. (p. 51)

Gayle Rubin (1984) calls this privilege the “charmed circle” of sexuality, which has heterosexual procreative masculinity at the top of the pyramid:

Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid. Individuals whose behaviour stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support and material benefits. As sexual behaviour or occupations fall lower on the scale, the individuals who practise them are subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disrespectability, criminality, restricted physical and social mobility, loss of institutional support and economic sanctions. (p. 279)

The Voices of the Boys

When I do in-service work with teachers, I have teachers each “take a voice” of one of the boys whom I interviewed. As we read through some of the dialogue, it provides a starting place for men teachers in particular to talk of their own masculine and sexual history.

Mike: Sports, looks and a woman. I think that’s what every guy needs to be masculine.

Luke: Sex is all about image. I think that a lot of guys when they go out, they put it on.

It’s like this hard shell. It’s like a jacket. They put it on before they step out the door, and they strut their stuff, and then they take it off when they come home, or if they come home with the guys they leave it on. And a big part of that is making sure that others know you’re not a queer.

Mike: Sports is probably the biggest thing to prove you’re a real man, besides not being a fag.

Eric: If you’re a big boy, then that’s probably number one. If you’re loud, that’s second; and if you’re intellectual, that’s third. Oh, you got to have girlfriends. If you’re a man with women, that’s probably number one.

The boys are clear about “what it takes to be a man.” They are also clear that masculinity is not a fixed role, available for any one of them to step into. Rather, they manipulate their bodies and strategize their social circumstances to achieve stability, protection and privilege that is worked on and paid attention to in all of their social interactions (Messner, 1986; Connell, 1989b).

Jim: Well, I think you have to keep trying. It’s not just sports that count. Things like having a driver’s license and having access to a car are very important. You need a car to transport females from point A to point B. But that’s not enough. Then, you need to have sex with females so you prove that you’re not a homosexual. And if that means beating a homosexual up, then that’s what you do. You should be a good size.

Trent: I find that you have to be constantly letting everyone know that you’re not

going to take any shit from anyone, that you're not going to be stepped on.

Evan: Playing sports and being good at it is very important, but you've got to be always meeting the standard. It's never finished.

Trent: Some guys use cars, some guys use weights, some guys do it through what they eat, how they stand, the deep voice. Some guys see how much alcohol they can drink, and some use girls. There are a lot of different ways to keep at the top.

Thomas: Yes, if you can't be male enough in one area of your life you can always make it up in another. If you don't have a lot of knowledge, then you can have a girlfriend. You're always working on it so if you fall down in one area, you try to make up for it in another. But you got to work at it.

Trent: I think there is a three-way tie for the top male behaviour: there's girls, weights and sports, and violence. I'm not really into weights. I'm not really into sports, but I do resort to violence sometimes, and I have a girlfriend. Violence is not really my tool. I just resort to it sometimes.

Luke: I guess it's pretty dumb, but fighting's one thing that comes along with being macho. It's something I've been doing since I was old enough to know how to throw a fist.

Trent: You have to work at it all the time or else someone will be there to take your place, and sometimes you'd rather not bother, and I don't.

Luke: I find it's easy getting along if you play your cards right. You have to make

strategies. First of all I got on a sports team to get accepted by the administration. If you're on a sports team you're rewarded. You're let off things. I did that at the first of the year so I wouldn't be hassled as much throughout the year by both other students and the administration. I hang around with the bigger guys who also play sports, the more popular people. I have a girlfriend. Those things make life pretty safe.

Trent: Most of the time you do it, or you will suffer the consequences, which can be pretty bad, depending on how far you stepped out of line. You can get called names, or isolated, but you also take the chance of getting the shit beaten out of you.

As well as knowing what constitutes the masculinity which is most valued, the boys articulated those behaviours that were the least acceptable: acting like a girl, any indication of what they considered homosexual behaviour, not participating in sports, and hanging out with the girls. These are all things that put the young men in a vulnerable position. The way to humiliate any individual boy or an entire team was to have a teacher or a coach suggest, always in the presence of others, that they were acting like girls or homosexuals.

Danny: At half-time if you're just playing a total bull shit game then the coach will come in and rip and curse you down trying to get you psyched up. He'll say that we are playing like a bunch of pussies and that the girls in junior high could do better than us. It's a war, and there's only one winner.

Jack: In basketball you hear "You pansies" and that kind of stuff when they're practising.

Jim: There are guys that everyone considers losers. To be a loser is to not have asserted your heterosexuality in society yet. You're a wimp or a fag. If you don't participate in sports, then you're at the bottom, and at the same time that you got a girlfriend, you can't be too nice to her. The guys, including my father, would say that she wears the pants if you let her make the decisions.

Derrick: Well, if you're labelled a fruit or a fag or so on socially, you might as well forget about it because you won't get a girlfriend, you won't get invited to any parties, you won't play any sports, you won't get invited to come over and jam on the drums. You have to sit at home or work at Towers. Being a heterosexual is definitely at the top. But at the same time you're not allowed to hang out with girls or be too nice to them. That's a real no-no.

Evan: Men act in ways that produce masculinity. That's what sports is about. That's what fighting's about. That's what having a girlfriend or having a good body is about. Those are things that gain you authority, power ... over other men and women. Men's relationships are about competition. You compete through women. You compete through sports. You compete through fighting. You compete through body size, through various things.

Trent: It isn't like it just happens. It takes a lot of time to be sure that you're always doing it right.

Jim: Some guys are usually looking to exterminate anything that doesn't fit their idea of the norm. Jocks mainly use jokes and with some guys, it's mainly kicking and

beating up people. The main way I can cope is by appearing in public with a girl. If people know you have a girlfriend, then they say, "Well, he must not be a homosexual." If you dress alternatively, and you're not seen with a girl, then you're automatically seen as a homosexual. There are guys in this school who have alternative ideas or dress and they have girlfriends. There are other guys who do the same but don't have girlfriends.

Thomas: In the end, that's all men have is their masculinity. Money really doesn't do it. Women can leave you. If you are gay with lots of money, it might help, but you could still lose your job or get put out of your apartment. All you've got left is yourself, your masculinity, and so that's all you can count on, and the best way to demonstrate it is through your body.

Threat, fear, intimidation and open, non-aggravated violence were the possibilities in most any social situation for some of the boys. Name calling, queer bashing, apartment trashing: these were the things of the everyday for some of the boys.

Jim: In some groups I don't pay attention as much to what I say, how I speak, the way I hold myself and my hand gestures. In some peer groups it's very unmasculine to use hand gestures because homosexuals use hand gestures. In some groups I narrow down my vocabulary. If you make it known that you're better educated than they are, you're looking for threats and physical violence. They use their muscles, not their brains. They don't use their hands to make jewellery or paint beautiful pictures. They use them to beat faggots' heads in. In the end it's about sexuality ... making sure that you're not a faggot.

Derrick: The guys who don't meet male standards are ignored. They aren't included in things, in activities in school. That would mean in classrooms and outside of the classroom. If people were going to go to Dairy Queen for lunch, they wouldn't be included. What would often happen in class is people would break up into groups. Teachers will say, "Form your own groups." They're the kinds of guys that would get left out constantly ... if they didn't get left out, they'd always end up in a group with other women. At noon hour, people will sit in the hallway in various parts of the school, and if they would walk by, people would make comments to them ... a lot of guys will sit against the wall with their legs out, and they would trip them.

Mark: Someone who shows weakness is at the bottom.

Derrick: The people who don't play sports, who sit home on a Friday and Saturday night, who enjoy playing with their computer, who don't seem to get along with girls and don't have girlfriends, or are too shy, and are physically less of a man ... nice and thin ... wieners. Someone like Peter. He has got a very, I guess you could call it a feminine voice, and from the moment people heard him, without any justification, he was a fag and that was it. He was ostracized. Definitely faggots are at the bottom. They appear feminine, like women. The way they walk.

Mike: Homosexuals are at the bottom of the masculine pile. I mean, they are way down there ... it makes sense. People who aren't men are women. Women are at the bottom. So ... homosexual guys are seen to be like women. Well, if you have sex

with men, you're a woman. Somebody's got to be the woman.

Thomas: They are so paranoid around here that they won't even let a person invite a member of the same sex to a school dance. There's even a rule about it that they keep putting over the P.A. I think that's really discrimination, and it's probably illegal.

Sean: The teachers hear the name-calling all the time. There's no way they don't hear "faggot" and stuff everyday, even in their classes. Sometimes they do it themselves.

Mark: The teachers do very little about any of it. Hardly a thing, and they're very aware of it. It was really blatant.

Sean: There's teachers out there who you go to and you say, "I'm scared, I'm intimidated, I'm afraid to walk down the hall..." "Who gives a shit? I don't like you either," is the feeling that you get from them.

Throughout we hear the misogyny, but perhaps never so clearly as here in this comment:

Mike: Every time I think of male sexuality, I think of the word "macho" and the violence. Male sexuality means doing things to females: calling them names, the catcalls, making them do your homework, getting them to lie to the teachers for you, fucking them.

One of the young men was openly gay. Even though his honesty had caused him some difficulties with friends and family, he was still willing to practice a sexuality that was often considered perverted. One should, however, be careful not to assume that with an alternate sexuality went an ideology and practice that was less heterosexist or sexist.

Jim: A friend of mine took about thirty stitches on various places of his body. Five guys kicked him repeatedly with steel toe boots. These guys didn't know who my friend was; they were just down looking for fights with anyone who doesn't fit their stereotypes. When I'm chased, I think it's because of my appearance.

Boys who see themselves as operating outside the hegemony of heterosexual masculinity were fine-tuned to the necessary strategies to protect themselves.

Jack: I make sure that I don't walk too feminine. I have done some modelling before, so if I were to walk that way around, school people would notice. I have been harassed. They do make fun of me by saying, "Do you think you're a fruit?"

Jim: The main way I can cope having an alternative appearance outside male culture is by appearing in public with a girl. If people know you have a girlfriend, then they say, "Well, he must not be a homosexual."

Even with the increased analyses around power and sexuality, relations of power still receive marginal, rather than central treatment in discussions of sexuality, particularly in schools (Weeks, 1986). In the environment of these boys, where one might anticipate some discussions on issues of sexuality and power, there were very few, even though this was a topic they themselves talked about in the interviews. It was as if there was a conspiracy of silence among and between men around their power in relation to women. Sex education classes seldom, if ever, raised issues of male abuse and violence toward women, sexism or heterosexism. Indeed, if anything, from the

boys' talk it is clear that their sex education classes, as well as other classes, perpetuated the notion of heterosexuality as the norm, and homosexuality or bisexuality or polymorphous sexuality as abnormal.

Ian Lumsden (1987), in "Sexuality and the State: The Politics of 'Normal' Sexuality," says:

The major institutions that affect collective sexual behaviour in our society are subordinate to the interests of the dominant economic class, which in turn is largely comprised of men imbued with heterosexual and patriarchal values. The institutions that I have in mind include the large corporations, which control not only the content of advertising and hence consumption, as well as the mass media, which depend upon advertising revenue, and the entertainment industry. Schools, universities, and most non-profit organizations fit into this category. These institutions promote and disseminate economic and political beliefs consistent with the interests of the dominant economic class. Moreover, they also further the heterosexist values which legitimize the prerogatives of heterosexual males, encourage the sexual and emotional dependence of women upon men, and invalidate homosexuality. For neither radical feminists nor openly gay men are to be found at the pinnacle of power in our society. In addition to these institutions, which support the hegemony of heterosexual patriarchal values, there are state agencies that are specifically empowered to intervene and regulate our sexual lives, such as law courts, the police force, censor boards and welfare agencies. (p. 193)

However, we need to be clear: The heterosexual pattern became dominant because the boys, the teachers, the parents, and the policies and practices of the school socially maintained and sustained it. This is not to suggest, then,

that male heterosexuality was some sort of conspiracy, or that these young men planned their collective activity against other men and women. However, "queer bashing," whether verbal or physical, and misogynist and sexist comments were seldom a piece of the boys' practice that was carried out alone. Both in their private lives and in the school, as well as with families and in the sports arena, the collaborative and collective practices of these young men, except in a few very well-defined incidents, almost always reinforced the heterosexual pattern found in the wider society.

Conclusion

As I suggested at the outset, the problem is not simply one of attitudes or of schools; rather, the problem is much more complex than that, for heterosexual masculine hegemony permeates every social site and creates a privilege against which it is indeed difficult to work. Perhaps the main difficulty is that for the young men in this study, like for most of us, the alternatives to the practice of heterosexual masculine hegemony are seldom made visible, let alone acceptable as practice, by other people or the institutions, such as schools. Certainly, in my experience as a school teacher for many years, those in school did not openly or warmly embrace "the possibilities of masculinities and sexualities." Sexual identities for these boys, for most students in schools, as well as for men in general, were put forth as fixed inflexible separations rather than a field of possibilities of practice (Messner, 1987).

However, in the end, we must remember that all practices are instances of human agency and, because of this, we must allow for the invention of a new language of possibility and a new set of practices: self-creation, mediation, resistance and transformation. In addition, it is

in this sort of analysis that we can find both a path for change and a hope for a different and better future. At the same time, however, this is not to mask or hide the dynamics of power around masculinity and sexuality by reducing it to individualism or attitudes.

This means that these young men, like all men, and the institutions which are themselves created and maintained by human effort, need *not* be seen as "fixed," unalterable and non-changeable. These fourteen boys, just as all men and women, engage in, accommodate, mediate, resist, and respond to the structures of men's domination and oppression. We must remember that no thing or process, other than individual and collective human agency, accomplishes and holds in place hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in schooling or in any other place, be that in the bedroom or the classroom. Stoltenberg (1977) says:

The process whereby people born with cocks attain and maintain masculinity takes place in male bonding. Male bonding is institutionalized learned behaviour whereby men recognize and reinforce one another's bona fide membership in the male gender and whereby men remind one another that they were not born women. Male bonding is political and pervasive.... Male bonding is how men learn from each other that they are entitled under patriarchy to power in the culture. Male bonding is how males get that power, and male bonding is how it is kept. (pp. 75-76)

However, those of us in the margins know that hegemony, be that through male bonding or in any of its forms and processes, is never complete. It does not work like that. The success of heterosexual masculine hegemony should not be overstated. As philosopher Michel Foucault (1979) has pointed out, the exercise of power, in the sexual as well as the

political realm, always generates some acquiescence and some resistance on the part of those who are the object of the exercise. In the end, it is that very site of marginality, that position of subordinated masculinity, that continues to allow for libratory transformations of practice to occur, including around sexuality. Illuminating individual and collective history often helps make visible how to create that counter-hegemonic marginal space where gay subjectivities are seen, rather than overseen by the authoritatorial voice of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, with its attempts to use its power to define and regulate gay men and their sexuality as abnormal, deviant and criminal. How we begin to focus on those spaces of resistance and the power of marginality within schools, be that the teachers who put writings by lesbian and gay authors on their course, or the gay or lesbian student or teacher who is "out and proud," will surely make all the difference to how we live in the world.

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