Young Men, Masculinities and Spirituality: An Introduction to a Special Issue of JMMS

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Young men have emerged as an important topic of inquiry in the past few decades in understanding masculinities. As Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily (2008) argue, exploring young men’s gender identities and performances “can be seen as a site of fissure with the past while simultaneously holding onto many issues of continuity” (p. 37). Young men, hence young masculinities, are characterized as “in crisis” or “in transition” from old masculinities to new, modern masculinities and gender identities. Young men, therefore, offer an extraordinary area of inquiry in understanding this crisis of masculinity.

This special issue focuses exclusively on young men and explores their masculinities, particularly in conjunction with spirituality. This is a truly interdisciplinary collection, bringing together scholars from a wide range of social sciences including sociology, political science, history and anthropology. Scholars from around the world, working on men and masculinities share their unique perspectives, theories and methods of studying young men.

Overview of the articles
The papers in this special issue all focus on young men, their masculine identities and spirituality. While the topics they focus on, the literature they borrow from and the theorists they build on show similarities, their approaches and tools differ inordinately. They all focus on young men, masculinity and spirituality, however the ways they define these terms differ greatly. Especially in defining spirituality, while some focus on the role of religions in shaping these masculine identities, others focus on the performative and ritual aspects of spirituality. Similarly, they employ a wide range of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, in studying young men. However, all papers in this special issue express interdisciplinary, comparative sensibilities in varying degrees in understanding young men.

The first paper, “Changing the Subject: Abortion and Symbolic Masculinities among Young Evangelicals” approaches the question of young men’s masculinities from a quantitative perspective. Daniel R. Cassino looks at the political views of young evangelical Christian men, particularly towards abortion. R. W. Connell shows that when hegemonic masculinity is threatened by rigorous attempts to achieve gender equality, it often results in a crisis of masculinity. Borrowing from R. W. Connell, Cassino argues that for evangelical Christian men, this crisis of masculinity is reflected in the area of politics. He argues that young men employ symbolic tropes in challenging hegemonic masculinities, particularly political ones, in recapturing their masculine identities. He focuses, particularly, on their attitudes towards abortion, in reconstructing their threatened masculine identities.
The second article focuses on an important part of young men’s lives—male initiation rituals—in understanding young men and masculinities. In “Male Initiation: Imagining Ritual Necessity” Diederik F. Janssen, explores the multi-faceted role of male initiation rituals and draws attention to its political and anthropological formulations. He identifies male initiation rituals as an important entry point in understanding the complex interplay surrounding masculinity.

In the third paper, “The Homosexual Subject: Coming-Out as a Political Act,” the author, Yong Wang, focuses on another important issue for young masculinities—the coming out process for homosexual young men. Homosexuality and coming out are important issues that concern not only young men’s masculine identities, but also religions as well. Using in-depth narratives describing the coming out experiences of homosexual youth, Wang explores the construction of masculine identity drawing on the work of Lacan. While both Janssen and Wang employ Lacan’s work in understanding young men and masculinities, the ways in which they use the Lacanian framework differ greatly.

The fourth paper also focuses on homosexuality. However, while Wang focuses on the coming out process and the construction of masculine identity among homosexual young men, Besen and Zicklin focus on the attitudes towards homosexuality among young men. In “Young Men, Religion and Attitudes towards Homosexuality,” the authors offer a quantitative survey of young men’s attitudes towards homosexuality in the United States and they explore the role of religion in determining and shaping these attitudes.

In addition to the four articles, the special issue includes two book reviews. These two recent books focusing specifically on young men and masculinities offer unique perspectives and are timely additions to our issue. First, historian Stephen Patnode, of State University of New York at Stony Brook, reviews Young Men and Masculinities: Global Cultures and Intimate Lives by Victor J. Seidler. Second, Andrew Singleton, of Monash University’s School of Political and Social Inquiry, offers us insight into Gary Barker’s Dying to Be Men: Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion.

Overall, I am honored to have worked with such a diverse group of extraordinary scholars, who have offered their unique perspectives on young men and masculinities, and I would like to thank the authors for their hard work and dedication as well as the anonymous reviewers who have provided insightful comments. I hope readers enjoy this interdisciplinary issue on young men.

References

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Changing the Subject: Abortion and Symbolic Masculinities Among Young Evangelicals

Dan Cassino

Challenges to hegemonic masculinity have been shown to lead men to adopt symbolic stances within the home to compensate. It is proposed that societal threats to masculine ideals – such as the gender crisis of the 1960s and 1970s – could lead to shifts in the way cohorts of young men perceive issues such as abortion, especially among evangelical Christians. A simultaneous equation model is used to test for the relative importance of religious and political factors in predicting views of abortion, taking into account the reciprocal effects of views of abortion and partisanship. Results show a remarkable increase in the impact of partisanship, and its interaction with religion, on abortion views.

In the United States, great strides towards parity of men and women were made in a short period in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating, arguably, in the Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision affirming the conditional right to an abortion. In so embracing women’s rights, though, the state risked what R. W. Connell (1990) refers to as a “gender crisis” caused by a “too vigorous” pursuit of equality. While the implications of this crisis for hegemonic masculinities have been much debated, little empirical work has been done on the concrete political effects of the crisis, especially among the men coming of age during and after such an upheaval. This paper proposes that among at least one group of these young men – evangelical Christians – the gender crisis led to a fundamental shift in the understanding of political issues that, for them, linked religion and politics in a way never experienced by their fathers.

This gender crisis comes as a result of challenges to the dominant normative model of what men are supposed to be – Connell’s “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1982 and 1987; Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, among many others). While this model of masculinity is powerful, constantly shaping the views and actions of men and women alike, it is not static, but is subject to a struggle over what the ideal male is. Mike Donaldson (1993) uses the example of stay-at-home dads, who seem to emphasize fatherhood, rather than breadwinning, as the source of their masculine identities. Of course, there has been a heated debate over the nature of change in masculinities, whether they are brought on by outside forces (Hochschild and Machung, 1989), or through some internal evolution (Connell, 1990). For our purposes, however, the cause of the
change in the nature of masculinities is largely immaterial: it is enough that the gender order shifted, and young men adopted a version of masculinity rather different from their fathers.

Whether the source of the gender crisis is some evolution of masculine identity (Connell, 1990 and 1995), economic shifts towards wage and earnings parity (Hochschild and Machung, 1989), or even political developments like Roe v. Wade, the timing of the crisis – the late 1960s and early 1970s – is not in contention. It is also not in contention that the reactions of men to this crisis varied widely. As Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999) argue, men adopt different elements of the masculine ideal depending on their circumstances. So, men who defined their masculinity through economic leadership, if faced with wage parity, may instead define themselves through spiritual leadership in the household, as a protector, or other symbolic acts. This reorganization can be clearly seen in Melanie Heath’s (2003) interviews with evangelical men: even when the wives made as much, or more, than their husbands, they described the husbands as being the decision-makers in the household. As one said, “I only have to answer to him; he has to answer to God.” In these cases, spiritual leadership seamlessly takes the place of economic leadership. The husband, if he is not the breadwinner, is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the household, or for protecting the household from thieves or other intruders. Even in cases where women earn substantially more than their husbands, Veronica Tichenor’s (2005) in-depth interviews show that couples continue to maintain – at least symbolically – traditional gender roles, in which the man is the primary earner, and the wife is the homemaker. For instance, women’s earnings do not seem to have much impact on the amount of housework they are expected to do (Greenstein, 2000; Gupta, 1999; Hochschild and Machung, 1989; Zelizer, 1989). In fact, it seems that when gender roles are upset by a woman’s earnings, men and women both engage in “gender display,” with men avoiding housework to compensate for the disruption (Bittmann et al., 2003). Men, especially evangelical men, then, attempt to perform gender through symbolic acts and statements (Gallagher and Smith, 1999): describing themselves for instance, as having the final say in any decision, even if they choose never to use it.

In these instances, we can see how men on an individual level respond to challenges to hegemonic masculinity. They make use of what we might call “symbolic masculinities”: strong affirmations of alternative aspects of hegemonic masculinity, made in an effort to downplay the significance of areas where they do not meet the hegemonic standard. Men who are not the primary wage earners in their household may stress their spiritual leadership, or role as protectors. They may pointedly refuse to do housework – women’s work – to the point that women who earn more than their husbands wind up doing more of the work than they would if they earned less.

The role of religion in these symbolic masculinities cannot be ignored. Previous work – such as that of Heath (2003), and Gallagher and Smith (1999) – looks specifically at evangelical men, such as those involved in the Promise Keepers movement of the 1990s. It may well be the case that the evangelical men feel greater pressure to conform to the hegemonic masculinity than men from more egalitarian denominations or religions, as evidenced by the emphasis placed by modern evangelical churches on women’s “responsibility” to assent to male


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dominance. In recent years, even as the Catholic Church has seen a resurgence in the movement among female congregants for equal status, evangelical sects such as the American Baptist Convention have very publicly issued statements reaffirming the importance of male dominance in the household, and female obedience to their husbands and fathers (Gallagher and Smith, 1999).

Just as threats to hegemonic masculinity on the household level lead individuals to embrace symbolic stances on issues like spirituality and housework, broader social threats to hegemonic masculinity may lead men to embrace symbolic stances on social issues. For instance, men threatened by changes in the hegemonic masculinity during the late 1960s and early 1970s could embrace symbolic issue positions against gay rights, or against abortion, or against restrictions on gun ownership. However, it is not enough to simply establish that individuals hold such issue positions. After all, they could easily hold such views independent of their potential implications for masculine identity, in the same way that individuals may oppose affirmative action programs either on principle, or out of covert racism (Sears, et al., 1997; Virtanen and Huddy, 1998). As such, evidence of issue positions taken as symbolic masculinities should come from the conditionality of these views on two factors.

First, these symbolic masculinities should be much more prevalent among young men – specifically those who came of age during or after the gender crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. By the time of the gender crisis, men born in the 1940s and 1950s had already established, or were well on their way to establishing, their masculine identities. Given the gender environment of the time, in which masculine dominance of the economic and social spheres was largely unchallenged, there was little need to reaffirm their masculinity with such symbolic stances. The men who came of age during or after the crisis, however, faced a much less secure gender environment, one in which economic and social dominance was not assured, and was not even necessarily considered to be preferable. As such, if individuals’ stances on the sorts of symbolic issues discussed above are a symbolic reaction to the gender crisis, we should see a substantial difference between young men – born after the gender crisis – and older cohorts.

Second, it seems that men’s predilections lead them to rely on different symbolic stances in the face of threats to their masculinity. The men in Tichenor’s (2005) study who made less than their wives stressed their joint decision-making in the household, while the Promise Keepers in Heath’s (2003) interviews were more likely to stress their role as the spiritual head of the household. Just so, social threats to the hegemonic masculinity should engender varied social responses. There is no attempt here to offer a comprehensive model of which groups or individuals will take up one symbolic stance or another, but some judgments may be less likely to be debated. For instance, among men for whom religion is an important part of identity, the symbolic stances should have some religious relevance. Men who already own guns may be more likely to stress the importance of protecting their family from intruders, just as men who earn significantly less than their wives may eschew housework. Among men for whom religion is more important, it should be possible to identify issue stances due to symbolic masculinities not from the stances themselves, but from the application of existing religious views to these issues.
All told then, among evangelical Christians in the United States, symbolic masculinities masquerading as issue stances should be evident from the application of religious views to new political issues among men coming of age during or after the gender crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. However, we need to identify an issue that these young evangelical men should be likely to focus on, and for the U.S., abortion seems a good candidate.

**The abortion shift**

With the court’s decision in *Roe*, the tenor of the debate over abortion in America abruptly shifted. Before the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion was largely a moral or religious issue; afterwards, it became one of the most fiercely contended issues in American politics. It inspired massive protests, intimidation campaigns, even murders. In some elections, it is the single most important issue, beating out concerns about war and peace, crime, and social services (Abramowitz, 1995).

In political science, views on abortion are generally seen as a predictor of attitudes and behavior – a stance that reflects the traditional understanding of their origins. The founders of modern American political science in *The American Voter* (Campbell, et al., 1960) considered religion, along with race and class, to be one of the primary predictors of political behavior. To the extent that abortion is seen as a religious issue, then, it does not make sense to treat it as an effect of political views, any more than race or gender.

![Figure One: Traditional and reciprocal models of the relationship between abortion and partisanship](image)

This view has been reinforced by studies such as that of Jacqueline Scott and Howard Schuman (1988), who find that all of the pro-life advocates identified in their study of GSS data in the early 1980s were regular church goers, and 40 percent named a religious figure – such as Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell – as being one of the most influential people of recent years. Furthermore, the faces of public opposition to abortion rights are explicitly religious: Catholics, for instance, dominated the pro-
life movement in the 1980s, often led by collared priests or habited nuns (Granberg and Granberg, 1985).

However, in the years since Roe, the discussion of abortion has become less explicitly religious in nature (Dillon, 1996; Grindstaff, 1994): abortion opponents are now much more likely to frame their objections in scientific or medical terms than they were in years past. The National Right to Life Council, for instance, lists infection, infertility, breast cancer and death as potential side effects of abortion, in addition to unspecified long-term psychological side effects, while making only limited appeals to morality, and no explicit references to God.

This decline in the religious nature of the abortion debate has been accompanied by a marked increase in the correlation between abortion views and partisanship. For the first decade after Roe, there was little polarization in abortion views between the Democratic and Republican parties: not until the early to mid 1980s did party activists and elites begin to fully conform to their parties on the issue (Layman and Carsey, 1998; Carmines and Woods, 2002). Candidates began to take their cues from these activists, and voters quickly followed suit. Today, individuals use attitudes towards abortion to shape their vote choice (Howell and Simms, 1993) at all levels of government, from the state office (Cook, Jelen and Wilcox, 1994) to the presidency (Abramowitz 1995 and 1997).

This shift implies that at least some individuals must have changed their views to comport with those of their political party, and this is surprising, not just because abortion is supposed to be grounded in religion. Abortion is also what public opinion researchers refer to as an “easy” issue: easily understood, with little confusion between outcomes and processes (Carmines and Stimson, 1980). As such, it should be more, not less stable over time. However, as political activists and elites became polarized, followed by major party candidates, voters were faced with a choice. The more involved an individual is with a political party – the more important that identification is to the individual’s identity – the greater the pressure they will feel to conform their views on an issue to that of their party, or their preferred candidate within that party. Given the real lack of political debate regarding abortion before Roe v. Wade, and the polarization of the parties afterwards (Abramowitz, 1995; Adams, 1997) many may have been left with abortion views at odds with those of their party. In such a situation, they have only three options. First, they could retain their views on abortion as well as their party identification: a stance that would become increasingly difficult as abortion becomes a more important issue (Zaller, 1992). Second, they could retain their views on abortion and drop their party identification, becoming an independent, or even a member of the opposite party. Finally, they could choose to simply alter their views on abortion to match that of their party. In doing so, they would be treating abortion as if it were simply another political issue; Geoffrey Layman and Thomas Carsey (1998) find this to be the most common solution among party activists.

While there are some individuals whose views on abortion remain at odds with that of the party they support (Abramowitz, 1995), the bulk of these come from lower socio-economic status voters who typically vote for the Democratic Party (Cook, Jelen and Wilcox, 1993), and may in fact be unaware of the incongruity. In 1992, Abramowitz (1995) finds that only 39 percent of pro-life Democrats knew that
the party and the candidate they supported was in opposition to them, while a much larger portion of pro-choice Republicans were aware of the disjoint.

In sum, Roe led to an abrupt change in the arenas in which the abortion debate was carried out. Before the decision, it was largely a religious issue; after, it quickly became a political one, and a source of great polarization for the two major parties. However, despite the noted decline in the explicitly religious elements of the abortion debate, religious figures and churches play a key role in the debate: as Connell (1990) notes, these movements are almost invariably church-based. This story, in which individuals suddenly find principled political reasons – such as women’s health – to support views previously espoused as religious, seems to indicate the adoption of issue stances as symbolic masculinities. The timing of the shift in the debate – the height of the gender crisis – also gives us a strong indication that, at least for evangelicals, abortion views may be best understood as symbolic masculinities.

Hypotheses
This leads to several hypotheses regarding the abortion views of young evangelical men. First, we expect that among those men socialized after Roe, views of abortion should be both a religious and a political issue, while older cohorts should see it as an essentially religious issue.

Second, we expect that the views young men take on as symbolic masculinities should extend beyond the single issue of abortion, especially as the views of abortion held by the major political parties diverge. While this polarization should mean that political views should impact views of abortion (Republicans and Democrats alike should feel pressure to conform to their party’s stance on the issue) among men young and old, we should observe a reciprocal relationship only among young men. The model suggested here of issue stances as a reaction to gender crisis, implies that men’s broader political views should be, at least partially, a result of their views of abortion, as they identify with the party that best reaffirms their masculinity. As such, while partisanship should always impact views of abortion, among young men, views of abortion should, in turn, reflect partisanship.

Third, young men’s views on abortion should be the product of religion, partisanship, and the interaction of the two. Republicans should be less accepting of abortion than Democrats, and members of strongly anti-abortion – particularly evangelical – sects should be less accepting of abortion than members of mainline protestant sects, but Republican evangelicals should be even less accepting than would be expected by an additive model.

Data
To test for the relative impacts of religious and political views on the abortion views of young men, the analysis makes use of the American National Election Study. Even limiting the analysis to the post-1970 bi-annual studies, this includes data on the abortion views of 5,489 respondents, along with numerous indicators of political and religious views.

The estimation of the effect of partisanship on views of abortion is complicated by the well-established reciprocal effects of abortion views on partisanship. Such a relationship typically requires the use of a simultaneous
equation model such as three-stage least squares. In such models, models for the two variables that are thought to impact each other are estimated in turn, with the results of one regression model used to inform the results of the other. This resulting process is considerably more fragile than a typical regression model, as its success is dependent on the inclusion of control variables that are correlated with one of the dependent variables, but not the other.

Estimation of the model in this paper is further complicated by a change in the way the ANES asked respondents about the issue of abortion since 1972. In all cases, respondents were given four options regarding abortion policy, and asked which came closest to their own views. In 1972, the options given to respondents were:

1. Abortion should never be permitted.
2. Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger.
3. If a woman and her doctor agree, she should be able to have a legal abortion.
4. Any woman who wants to have an abortion should be able to have one.

In later years, the final two options were changed:

3. Abortion should be permitted if, due to personal reasons, the woman would have difficulty in caring for the child.
4. Abortion should never be prohibited.

While these categories are substantively similar, treating them as being exactly the same in an ordered logit or similar scheme risks confounding the results. This leads to a choice: we can either exclude early years from the survey – thus losing a large portion of the sample – or use the existing variables to construct a different measure of abortion views. Given the importance of including data from as early a time period as is relevant, and to aid in the interpretation of the statistical models, the first two categories are lumped together to represent conservative views on abortion, and the last two as liberal views on abortion. In all of the models here, a respondent will be assigned a value of “1” if they said that either of the last two categories came closest to their views, and “0” if they chose one of the first two categories.

As this renders one of the dependent variables dichotomous, Maddala’s (1983) simultaneous equation model for one continuous and one dichotomous endogenous variable is used (as implemented by Keshk, 2003). While the standard seven point partisanship scale used is not truly continuous, it contains enough categories to allow estimation with a minimum of inefficiency.

Finally, because the hypotheses hold that men socialized before Roe made abortion a political issue should differ from those socialized after the decision, a distinction must be made between the two groups. While there is no bright line separating them, the birth year of 1960 is used to separate those who have been mostly socialized before Roe, and those mostly socialized after. While this distinction is arbitrary, it is early enough to generally work against the hypotheses. After all,
men born in 1960 were 13 years old at the time Roe was decided, and presumably had much of their masculine identities already defined.

Findings

Results for the simultaneously estimated models for partisanship and abortion views can be found in Table One.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Abortion Views</th>
<th>Born Before 1960</th>
<th>Born in 1960 or after</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party ID</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical?</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic?</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish?</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Attendance?</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Role</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID x Evangelical</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Party ID</th>
<th>Born Before 1960</th>
<th>Born in 1960 or after</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Abortion</td>
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<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical?</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic?</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish?</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat Feeling Thermometer</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Feeling Thermometer</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>0.175</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black?</td>
<td>0.636</td>
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<td>Asian?</td>
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<td>Native American?</td>
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<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age?</td>
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<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age x Evangelical</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table One: Simultaneous equation model results

The strength of simultaneous models is dependent on the explanatory power of each: if one of the models is bad, so too is the other. In this case, the diagnostics appear strong, especially for the model of men born after 1959, in which the model correctly places about 2/3rds of respondents on abortion position, and has an $R^2$ of .53 for the partisanship model. The models of older men perform slightly worse, but as they are included mostly for comparative purposes, this is not a cause for great concern.

As demonstrated by the difference in the constant, men born after 1960 had a much greater likelihood of holding a liberal view of abortion, all else equal. However, the dynamics overlaying that constant are very different for those born before and after 1960.

The results of Table One show a striking difference in the impact of partisanship on abortion views among men born after 1959. For both younger and older men, becoming more Republican leads to a lower likelihood of liberal views on abortion. While interpreting probit coefficients can be difficult, we can say that moving from strong Democrat to strong Republican in a man born after 1959 who otherwise had a 50 percent chance of supporting either side would decrease the likelihood of a liberal view on abortion by 40 points, to 10 percent. The same
transformation among an individual born before 1960 would result in a 39 percent chance of holding a liberal view of abortion.

In addition, religion, too, has a greater effect on men born after 1959 than those born before 1960. In comparison to the excluded category of mainline protestants,² belonging to an evangelical sect had twice as great an influence on younger men than it did on older men. Among young men, being an evangelical led to a decrease of about 33 percent in the likelihood of supporting abortion rights; among men born before 1960, this effect was about 22 percent. Attending church had a similar effect for both groups: those who attended weekly or more attended church (coded as 1 on the church attendance variable; 5 represented never attending) were about 16 percent less likely to hold liberal views of abortion. Interestingly, and perhaps reflecting John Evans (2002) findings about increased intra-sect differences, membership in the other religious groups modeled (Judaism and Catholicism) had an effect on abortion views only among older men. Among men born after 1959, Catholics and Jews were statistically indistinguishable from mainline Protestants in their views regarding abortion, all else held equal.

So, while being a member of an evangelical sect had a greater effect on young men than on older men, religion overall seems to have had a greater effect on the abortion views of men born before 1960. For that cohort, membership in any of the major religious denominations in America impacted abortion views. Among younger men, the effect of being Catholic or Jewish was only half as strong, and insignificant. Younger men more than make up for this difference in the impact of partisanship on abortion views, with partisanship having four times the impact that it does on older men.

The second hypothesis dealt with the reciprocal nature of the relationship between partisanship and abortion views among young men. While partisanship has an effect on the abortion views of both younger and older men, when all else is taken into account, abortion views predict the partisanship only of younger men. For young men, at least, it seems that views of abortion both cause, and are caused by partisanship: a finding consistent with young men who come to a political party partially due to their views on abortion, then see those views reinforced by their membership in that party. This, in turn, strengthens their partisanship, and the cycle continues. Among older men, there is certainly a correlation between being a Republican and holding conservative views of abortion, but the simultaneous equations allow us to determine the direction of the causal arrow. Republicanism leads to slightly more conservative views of abortion, but those more conservative views fail to lead to stronger partisanship, reinforcing the notion that for this cohort, abortion views are far less political than they are for younger men.
The final hypothesis deals with the interaction of partisanship and religion in predicting men’s views of abortion. Among older men, the interaction between evangelicalism and partisanship is only marginally significant, with a z-value of 1.63, but tells an interesting story. It is of almost exactly the same magnitude, and in the opposite direction, of the coefficient attached to the main effect of partisanship. As such, among evangelicals, the two effects cancel each other out completely. For the older cohort, among evangelicals, partisanship has no net effect on abortion views.

Among younger men, the interaction effect is in the opposite direction of the main effect of partisanship, but of about a third less magnitude. As such, the effect of partisanship on views of abortion is expected to be about three times as large among mainline Protestants as it is among evangelicals. Put together, this means that for young men, evangelical and non-evangelical Republicans should have about the same issue positions on abortion, with the effect of politics trumping all else. Among young Democratic men though, religion is expected to have a huge impact, with evangelicals showing substantially lower likelihoods of holding liberal abortion views.

Finally, we should make some note of the relative convergence in the effects of membership in a non-evangelical congregation. While Catholicism increased, and Judaism decreased, the likelihood of liberal abortion views among older men, their effects disappeared in younger men. Assumably, members of these religious groups found alternative symbolic masculinities, or otherwise adapted to the changes in the hegemonic masculinity.
Discussion

When faced with their own failure to live up to a hegemonic masculine ideal, men seem to be more resourceful than we sometimes give them credit for. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) relate the story of a Soviet coal miner, Aleksandr Stakhanov, who became a Soviet folk hero for hewing over 100 tons of coal in a single day, a feat that led to a scramble to beat even his record. The findings here suggest that when faced with their inability to attain impossible masculine ideal, hewing tons of coal or maintaining complete male dominance in an increasingly egalitarian society, some men take the other path. While some may have attempted to beat Stakhanov’s record, others, the findings suggest, asserted their masculinity in unrelated ways, perhaps in the amount of vodka that could be drunk, or in military service.

These findings also suggest that this is largely a young man’s game. Threats to masculinity seem to be rather more important to sons than to their established fathers. This finding is also the product of the broad range of literature concerned with the inculcation of masculinities into boys. Boys are not born knowing how to express their masculinity, but learn, at critical ages in their development, what is expected of them. Our results also suggest that once these preferences are set, they are generally stable over time: older men do not seem to have resorted to views of abortion as a symbolic masculinity. In addition to its roots in development, this also probably has to do with age and cohort effects: simply put, it is not men in their 30s and 40s who were threatened by the gender crisis, but the teenagers trying to newly assert their masculine identities.

While this analysis has focused on one issue – abortion – there is good reason to believe that several other political stances may have their roots, for certain individuals, in symbolic reactions to threats to hegemonic masculinity. Issues related to traditional conceptions of masculinity are most likely to be the result of these processes: homosexuality, women’s rights, protection of the family. Future research in this area should explore the extent to which challenges to hegemonic masculinity are leading men from certain groups to embrace issue positions in these areas.

Future work in this area should also examine the extent to which women change their issue positions in response to the same symbolic masculinities that shape men’s views. Certainly, the shift in the abortion debate from religion to politics did not happen just among men. Moreover, previous work (such as Tichenor, 2005 and Heath, 2003) has shown that women often reinforce men’s views on these issues – encouraging their husbands to see themselves as leaders, protectors or decision makers as compensation for failures to conform to the hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, it is important to note that the source of young men’s views of abortion in symbolic masculinities does not render these views any less sincere. Much of the work in political psychology over the past 15 years has been an attempt to slay what John Bargh (1999) refers to as the “cognitive monster”: the extent to which our opinions and even actions are controlled by processes beyond our control or even awareness. Men who embrace restrictive views of abortion because of societal threats to hegemonic masculinity may very well believe in the principled reasons that they offer for their views, and it is only through reciprocal causation models or experiments that we can show the true source of their attitudes. This also means that the men embracing symbolic masculinities are hardly unique: the
motivations underlying most political behaviors may well be hidden from the individual. If we want to understand these behaviors, though, it means that we have to move beyond asking people about their motivations, and turn to experiments and quantitative analyses like these to fully appreciate the importance of these symbolic masculinities.

References


Notes

1 Individuals belonging to any of the following sects were considered to be evangelical: All Baptist sects, United Missionary, Protestant Missionary, Church of God, Holiness, Nazarene, Free Methodist, Church of God in Christ, Plymouth Brethren, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, Missouri Synod Lutheran, Adventist, or any other fundamentalist sect.

2 Listing their church as being: Protestant, Non-Denominational, Non-Denominational Community Church, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational, Evangelical and Reformed, Reformed, Dutch Reformed or Christian Reformed, United Church of Christ (Not Church of Christ), Episcopal, Anglican, Church of England, Methodist (excluding Free Methodist), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), United Brethren, Evangelical Brethren, Disciples of Christ, ‘Christian’, Mennonite, Amish, Church of the Brethren, or interdenominational protestant.

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Male Initiation: Imagining Ritual Necessity

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Immanent in contemporary constructions of and approaches to masculinity is the pertinence of enculturation, the notion of preliminal male subjectivity, and tropes of maturation. Addressing this multi-faceted pertinence, this paper examines anthropological-political formulations of male initiation in terms of the cultural necessity by which it is routinely characterized. This study requires a cross-disciplinary approach and highlights major interpretative schisms among masculinity scholars. Studying the phenomenon of initiation presents an entry to the complex interplay of social ontology (‘men’, ‘boys’) on the one hand, and the (re)imagination of cultural legitimacy on the other. Hence, seeming interpretative necessities refer not just to the phenomenological level, but also to science-sociological, ethical and ethno-linguistic (allegoric) levels of deliberations on masculinity and youth. As a case study, contemporary American ideas about male ritualism are discussed, followed by a short typological suggestion for analyzing necessary masculinity and maleness in ritual.

“...If we’re going to fantasize ritually, then for god’s sake—rather, for the sake of the goddesses—let us do so with irony and humor, as Apuleius did.” (Grimes, 2000, p. 33)

A by now familiar corollary of the “intersectionalist” and deconstructive approach to men seen particularly during the 1990s, masculinity has been studied extensively as a trajectory and accomplishment rather than an immutable category. This has made the subject of enculturation critically pertinent to the social ontology of men (e.g.: not boys) as well as to the cultural semantics of “the masculine.” Ethnographic studies of initiation, for instance, may refer to thresholds, penetration, or incorporation as tropes largely distinctive of the male attitude to or experience of — in familiar anthropological jargon — the life cycle. Boys, in other words, are “about men.” Manhood, in turn, is about boyhood.

The pertinence of trajectory in masculinity studies presented itself pressingly during a bibliographic approach to worldwide “male rites of passage” (Janssen, 2006/7). However, in ethnographic communications masculinity may seem to be a structuring device for, by-product of or merely informing a prescribed dramatis...
personae for, ritual eventuality. Unsurprisingly we find that the very operationalization of masculinity, and consequently its theoretical mobility, varies with paradigms of interest as is concerned ritual: “sex roles,” “gender identity,” “male envy,” “patriarchy,” “religion,” “invention of tradition” and cultural revitalization, “mythopoesis,” “spirituality,” “performativity,” and so on. These paradigms inform late 19th and 20th century anthropological interest in male initiation, but also pervade contemporaneous public imagining and psychomedical theorizing of the male life course as segmented and “developmental.”

This paper locates these diverse paradigms and asks how ritual has been imagined as crucial for the (re)imagination of the masculine subject. As an anchor for cultural imagination, interpreting initiation refers to a number of anthropological-theological quagmires, among these the ultimate work, or functional necessity, of ritual. Initiation rites, in the armchair and textbook experience, often instrumentalize academic perspectives on masculine trajectories as schismatic, disruptive and non-linear. The major role of academe has consequently been to theorize the psychocultural necessity of this finding. Psychoanalysts, for instance, have primarily theorized the presence and plot of initiations of boys in terms of universal decompensations, necessary disidentifications and foundational resolutions (e.g. Lidz and Lidz, 1989). Ritual here is seen as a dramatized part of generally dramatic constructions of gender that implicate a double necessity: that of staging, or complementing the staging, of the cultural plot, and that of resolving the psychostructural problem, of early life feminization. Necessary action is essential (ontologically critical) re-action. In this article I venture that these suggestions (1) hint at the productivity of studying ritual efficacy in societies where and when such efficacy is both absent from mainstream public life and subject to wide and sustained interest; and (2) render the study of ritual contingent on a “sociology of science” perspective. I will substantiate these theses by pointing to the contingencies and effects of ontological choices in various (semi-)academic perspectives on initiation; the (concomitant) tension between cultural categories and cultural agenda; inherently, intrusive aspects of analysis and imperativeness of ethical (“gender”) and metaphorical commitments; and lastly, the perhaps necessary analytic delimitation of ideas about ritual efficacy.

I propose a qualitative approach because in the quantitative cross-cultural tradition “presence of [male] initiation” is defined by approximate coincidence of age of initiands or application of western biomedical categories (“puberty,” “adolescence”), thereby disregarding the interplay of ritual efficacy and indigenous age grading and ethno-phenomenological ramifications of the events. Initiation rituals here are simply specified for male sex (not gender); statistical processing of their gendered functions therefore does not and cannot refer to ethnographic observations on ritual efficacy. Specifically, mainstream anthropological definitions seem to disallow the observation that gendered categories are constituted and age grading is accomplished through ritual, rather than their demographic referentiality being suitable for definition, analytic delimitation and specification (“male adolescent rituals,” “puberty rituals,” “male initiation rites”). For this reason this approach is largely unproductive in addressing the stated conundrum of ritual efficacy.
**Making men: Mirrors, ontology and metaphor**

According to Lacan an infant embodies an undifferentiated libidinal field without distinction of self/world, bathing in a semiotic flux of prelinguistic images and sounds, until immersion in this Lacanian “real” is disrupted by the child’s recognition of a reflected self-image being complete and apart. Thus is initiated a divorce from the real and passage into the symbolic as signaled by the death of the mother and entry into the masculine world of “différance”: a world of meaning characterized by endless interplay, endless deference. This inaugurates a triple semiotics as anchored by the phallus: the being, having, and lacking of “it.”

A disruptive confrontation occasions a passage between paradigms of impressions, a formative introduction of symbolism, and a leaving behind of a praeter-symbolic maternal paradigm — a trajectory understood by Lacan as masculinization. Such a total, signifying experience is reminiscent of observations on what structuralist anthropologists call *initiation rituals*. Here, it could be argued, masculinity is less profoundly humanizing and more complexly symbolizing; according to ethnographic argument, however, here too the totalizing elements of death and rebirth are essential to the plot. Man creates man in the line of men. It has been argued that this “perspective” sets apart male from female initiations phenomenologically, where the latter would be puberty-occasioned, ceremonial, celebratory and announcing of a girl having become “nature’s vehicle of life” as Joseph Campbell put it (or elsewhere some attempt to contain or “censor,” as Lacan allows, her natural development), and the former quite the opposite: an intervention enacted if not against then in juxtaposition to originating associations with the natural sphere, a *ritual* proper, a clean departure. Quite alike being confronted with one’s (or a) mirror image, in his initiation the boy is confronted with the enigma, charisma and symbolic necessities of the manhood to which he belongs, operationalized as an entire paradigm of engagement — office, lineage, of observances, alliances, regulations, privileges, traditions — the significance and importance of which exceeds that of a single lifetime. His realization of this paradigm will inform his “masculinity”; before he does, he needs to be disowned of his trust in a prior paradigm; until he does, he will be suspended in a liminal mode of “reflection” (or *reflexivity*, as Victor Turner has it).

We note however that rather than implying symbolic incarnation, such “initiations” may signal a *passing* of essential substance, or a communitarian process, so that the metaphorical salience of death in the events *as a whole* seems diminished. J. W. Fernandez (1980) centralizes the interdependence of individual and collective history in Mbiri-Bwiti initiation when a neophyte stares into a looking glass until the face of an ancestor fuses with one’s own. As Fernandez observes the ritual initiates a persona only in the context of emphasizing genealogical continuity, a function variably conceptualized in native analysis.

Another phenomenological approach to male/female initiations states that female initiation entails continued *enablement* of man’s contact with the sacred, while male initiation refers to continual *establishment* of such contact. Such a ramification however becomes untenable in many rites and religious systems. In New Guinea, for instance, male ritual seems to be anchored symbolically by appropriating by ritual intervention the esteemed natural features, or ward off the
feared destructive properties, of mature female physiology (e.g. Allen, 1998). In the case of syncratic Bwiti initiation, among Mitsogho, who introduced Bwiti to Gabon, the rite is indeed exclusively male (Gollinhofer and Sillans, 1976), however the Fang, who adopted the rite, also allow women as initiands. Compromising a solidly gendered gestalt of “vision,” Native American vision quests, at least as initiatory devices, were not restricted to males in a number of communities. Furthermore, quite similar interpretations of transformation are offered today for female as for male initiations, specifically in terms of indigenous ambiguities, complexity and contestation of status transitions.

More generally one might argue that the production of a masculine entity pertains to the recodification of a binary, and often, a hierarchical distribution of opposites. Inasmuch indigenous references to the word male/man may be used “boastfully” to connote a negation in terms of gender (‘not woman’, ‘not effeminate’; e.g. Iroquoian examples in Hewitt, 1888, p. 324), the same function often relates to life phase as positional status. Argues Deborah Elliston, rather than as instantiating masculinity onto itself,

the ritual teachings and practices of boys’ initiations can usefully be analyzed for their deployment of gender as a conceptual scheme for thinking about relations of difference and, thus, as a model of and justification for the age hierarchy among boys and bachelors of various age grades, and the gender hierarchy. (Elliston, 1995, p. 856).

Women indeed are variably implied and in fact centralized and transformed themselves in many male cults, for instance as suggested in a recent collection of papers on New Guinea (Bonnemère, ed., 2004). Furthermore, by virtue of liminal suspension of gender “roles,” a neophyte may be thought of as transcending quotidian complementarily, and accomplish holistic embodiment.

Whether “initiations” contribute to some distribution of gender or transcendence of structural confinements is, in honest assessment, ethnographically inconstant. It should furthermore be noted, with Campbell, that the very idea of opposites and the concept of nature are variably imagined ethically even within societies, and variably as gendered. However, even apart from these caveats, initiation is, as Claude Calame (1999) reminds, situated between the formal and the figurative, and this semantic situation should complicate any generalization about ritual ontology and efficacy. This pertains importantly to the interpretation of ritual efficacy and necessity in “male initiations,” as papers by Donald Gardner (1983) and Borut Telban (1997) perceptively analyze, for instance, in Ambonwari initiation, rather than being put through a metaphorical death, boys are “cut off from their parents and ‘thrown’ abruptly into a state of becoming,” an absolute beginning rendering death genuinely possible, not a metaphoric necessity (Telban, 1997). We note, lastly, that what we choose to call maturation may be a deeply impressive experience without necessarily having to foreground gender or some metaphor of transition. To stay with our mirror allegory, in Gus van Sant’s Gerry (2003) when Gerry seems “rescued” and driven back to the world of the living, face burned, he looks at the small boy next to him on the back seat, who looks out of the window onto the plains, then to his dad driving, dad looking onto the road ahead but
then checking on Gerry in his inside rear mirror, who seems startled for a moment by this return of gaze... Gerry looks outward again, onto the plains where he ended the life of Gerry, his smaller alter. While no role of substance is played by women in this minimalist film, can we say it portrays a male necessity, or necessarily male tragedy?

“Initiation” may not even be the subject. The mythopoetic claim of the necessary role of fathers or older men seems negated in the film (the plot seems to be “getting lost” on a wilderness trail to “The Thing”). The inevitability of death, murder even (as the story is said to be based on) however is alluded to, but also its sheer tragic eventuality. We must observe, perhaps, that “the past haunts us” as we drive back to civilization the products of its profundity, however different than in ancestor cults, “our” Western mirror being an inside rear mirror of necessity, checking on the boys on the back seat as we go on. (Perhaps all we might conclude is that Arvo Pärt’s equally minimalist and prismatic Spiegel im Spiegel fits well in all this, as Van Sant suggested.)

Abject ritualism and ritual necessity in America

Both mythology and comparative work on male initiation have observed the basic gendered plot criticized above for over a century, and although mythology and ritual exegesis have shown variance in their deciphering of cultural necessities, seeing masculinity as a universal plot is perhaps easiest when observing it as “a precarious or artificial state [...] problematic, a critical threshold that boys must pass” (Gilmore, 1990, p. 11). Indeed, this anthropological truism is so demanding that the discourse is reversed in the Western imagination: what is considered as critically informing mature masculinity is called both a ritualization and initiatory of such status. Or rather, in the West generalized ideas of ritualized initiation came to inform a model, a motif, for “understanding” the “typifying” phenomena to be ascribed to what in the 20th century came to be called adolescence (e.g. Jeffrey, 1995; Foley, 1993; Alves, 1993) and henceforward to any “difficult process,” such phenomena thereby emerging as “necessary” and “essential.” After Hall and Erikson, the Americanism of adolescence itself, rather than masculinity, became a concept rendering “necessary” any inaugurating behavior that would have to be called typical, delayed or regressive, depending on its timing. This transferal of the motif of initiation from masculinity to the increasingly rationalized psychomedical notion of “life phases” aided in the cultural and capitalist centralization of “adolescence”: the necessary yet perpetual quest for identity as tied to products, fashions, self-stylization and “healthy” functioning.

Paradoxically, after the 1970s initiation became both ethically suspect and a central objective in the ethical imagination of American masculinity. “Kind-of” rituals and “sort-of” initiations often proved popular qualifications informing critical perspectives on male “adulthood,” interpreting ritualism and ritualization in defiance of demanding anthropological definitions, instead in terms of a failure of culture to deal “properly” not with “thresholds” or “crisis” (Erikson) but neurotic craving for status recognition, identity panic, and “hegemonic” (Connell) or “compensatory” “hyper-”masculinity (e.g. Van der Meer, 2003; Kimmel, 2007). This would produce pathetic, dysfunctional makeshift rituals that would not produce maturity but signal its delay or bankruptcy — “bunny bashing to manhood” (Foster, 1996), “jumping in,” or “21 for 21.” From the 1970s negative appraisal of “adolescent ritualism” spilled
over to what was increasingly considered continuous with it: “male ritualism.” Thus, “blood pinning” in the navy, according to Elizabeth Gleick (1997), denoted from “macho” to “barbaric” because of the military’s “seeming inability to police itself.” The trope of transgressive initiation, then, was tied to the demanding plot of macho culture even where the presence of ritualism in the strict sense is arguable.  

How to theorize this contested legitimacy of men doing ritual, and of ritual as masculinizing? The pervasively psycho-analytic Menschbild in the 20th century West would allow a look at psychological theories of symbolism; and masculinity and ritual both being Anglo-American analytic concepts (for a note on initiation and the German notion of Männerbunde, see Brunotte, 2000), it would not be outrageous to start on native soil. That is to say, there is something of an ethnographic legitimacy to analyze masculinity in terms of its ethnotheoretical properties. Symbolic self-completion theory postulates that a felt shortcoming in one symbolic dimension of a self-defined goal, for instance status anxiety, may trigger emphasis on some alternative symbolic dimension, thus effecting a compensatory self-symbolizing (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982). Illustratively Mark Carnes (1989, pp. 14, 155) found that the urban middle class phenomenon of secret, elaborate initiations into fraternities, “a distinct product of Victorian American culture and society,” provided “solace and psychological guidance” in a time of manhood acquiring “a wide range of roles and statuses,” and against the background of an increasingly feminized and sentimental religion and a new powerful domestic ideology. Adds Daniel Soyer (1999), American-Jewish lodge rituals provided common experiences, psychological guidance, dignified prosaic activities, and relief from the tensions of social transformation and transition accompanying immigration. We see “initiated” not a fresh masculinity, but masculinity re-emerging from freshly potent symbolic realms.

Historically the “charm,” the “mystique,” of ceremonial fraternalism precedes and fades with the rising charm of “the American boy” as an elusive fixture and nostalgic antipode to the man to be reformulated through capitalist and psychological alongside parochial ideas of “development,” “adulthood” and “maturity” (Janssen, 2007, pp. 58-59). This may well betray the psycho-cultural-historical necessity of either phenomenon (“boyhood” and exclusive “fraternity”): a felt need to reserve masculinity: as a literal fait accompli, as privileged artifice, exclusive discontinuity, and elusive plot. There is a poetic necessity to even secular masculinity, and with it a cultic and sociologically counter-rational principle: the rite is secret, its work ineffable, its products “beautiful.”  

Ceremony facilitated the imagination of an exclusive realm of ascendance, and would provide what a discursive, emotionally invested bifurcation (boys and men) of the life course would accomplish at the turn of the century. This at least is what consensus allows. Men, specifically in periods of history considered “critical” (that is, where male authority or male-invested projects come under siege, subject to culture-wide changes or pressured by grandiose ambitions) project masculinity backward (nostalgia), inward (the interior boy) and outward, either through an exclusionary claim to pedagogical expertise (“boyology”) and formation of all-male agogical enclaves operating via hierarchical, idealized commitments (“pedagogical eros”), even sacralizations and deifications (“divine boys” are found prominently in medieval Buddhist Japan, Sufi mysticism, Greek mythology — sites that had
elaborate male ceremonialism though no ritualization of masculinity).

These dynamics can be productively analyzed as concurrent in a range of settings, including 19th century America, Victorian Britain, Nazi Germany, and albeit in differing ways throughout Far and Near Asian history. In the postindustrial West, men appear to fall back on “the boy” per se, that is, a body defying and resisting the (demystifying, feminizing, deconstructive) performances of the egalitarian welfare state and the concomitant scientific apparatus that makes “minors,” “children” and “subjects” out of boys, and bounded, domestic role-takers out of men. Masculinity is constructive, perhaps best illustrated when it allows itself being pushed into an anti-deconstructive mode. Again, ritualized initiation in (aspiring) gender-egalitarianist societies comprises an ambivalent romance, offering “intriguing,” and “cool,” documentary material but inviting journalism mainly in the event of casualties or deficiency of its charisma in the face of rival truth-paradigms, for instance in terms of “human rights,” “child rights” or legal concepts such as “indoctrination,” “sexual” violence, and bodily “integrity” (examples abound for urban gangs, military training, universities, and from contemporary rural South Africa to the Anglo world of elite sports and fraternities).

Male anxiety in late 20th century middle class America would produce a revival “boy-ology,” Kenneth Kidd (2004) and others argue, but also seems to have shifted back and forth between finding “solace” in the boy as the promise of innate (i.e. paradoxically real and mysterious, deep and mythical) identity and (hence) agogical privilege, and finding it in ritual as a restorative praxis. In the American post-Vietnam mythopoetic imagination, absence of ritualization, and ritualized initiation most critically, has been associated with the alleged demise of “mature masculinity” more than with maturity per se, a discussion opened up by motivated rereading of Campbell’s The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) and Eliade’s Rites and Symbols of Initiation (1958) in the 1970s, famously rearticulated in Bly’s 1990 Iron John and expanded in his 1996 The Sibling Society (for an extensive analysis of the American mythopoetic-Jungian argument see Howard, 1997).

Capitalism in America allowed the consumption of, or a buying into, the idea that flat consumerism misses out on “something essential.” The spiritual limbo normative for egalitarianist and careerist social strata under capitalism was being likened to the ambivalent limbo in which uninitiated men find themselves (consider the striking example of Nuer “bull-boys”: Hutchinson, 1996, pp. 270-298). Conversely critics considered mythopoiesis as covert regression, in that “what is to be retrieved is not ‘deep manhood,’ but ‘deep boyhood,’ a playfully innocent and romanticized view of masculinity without adult responsibility of work and family” (Kimmel and Kaufman, 1993, p. 3). Quite the reverse of the poetic envisioning of American masculinity, this diagnostic register seems to want to invalidate its non-productive and counter-domestic ills: to oppose the presumed ethical corollaries of non-“development” into ethical conformity. However the Kimmel/Bly controversy is based on a shared premise, that of historical mutability of ethical orientation, and of a psychological and utilitarian understanding, rather than a transcendental embedding, of ethics. For Kimmel ritual would only cash “patriarchal dividend,” for Bly it would reaffirm the “journey” trope so appealing to a nation characterized (it is argued) by inter-generational schisms and betrayals, yet so full of hope for “healthy,” “productive” maturity and of ambition to “grow.”
Little of this therapeutic and meritocratic paradigm is seen in the “ancient” or “tribal” experience that would inspire this American discourse; even in Europe cultural and personal change are differently imagined. Where Grimes wanted to get *Deeply into the Bone* (2000), Foucault wanted “limit experiences,” not a ritual “coming-into-one’s-own.” (Reportedly, however, he got most of these in America.)

Male ritualism, especially initiation, may seem a political necessity to militaristic, territorialist, nationalist, expansionist and revisionist societies, elites and enclaves; as is well known, so is poetic and homoerotic investment in imagining the pedagogical task as epitomized by formation of exclusive “bonds” (Tiger’s notion in his 1969 *Men in Groups*). In fact such an imagining has been considered the very spiritual axis of many such societies (in Western history the Greek παιδεία and Spartan ἄγωγη stand out as examples). Ritual, in the same vein as the poetic image of *the boy*, articulates a “romance,” “cult” or “idealization” by rendering the idea of masculinity contingent on its malleability, its creation *de novo* as staged by its heroic “inauguration,” but precisely as this entails an agogical concept of masculinity. Inauguration “accomplishes” not only manhood but also the condition that it is said to undo (boyhood), or rather, it accomplishes an idea of masculinity premised on notions of threshold and transcendence. Ritual, then, may not predominantly function to create *a man out of a boy*, but create a male culture in which *a man is made among men*. Such if anything was envisioned by the mythopoets: not boys’ introduction to, but a pacifist, therapeutic and communitarian reimagining of, the stakes of masculinity as “mature” (and onward to, in the case of Bly, the stakes of maturity *per se*). A compatible argument was offered by James Hillman (1979) where he proposed to correct prior theorizing in that initiation would not produce a *senex* out of a *puer*, but instead a *puer/senex* whole, a “union of sames” rather than of gendered opposites, thus effecting “an affirmation of the mythical meaning within all reality” (pp. 29, 30ff).

**Ontological closure**

A basic ontological problem presents itself at this (American) point. If *ceremonial* and *ritual* origin distinguishes the phenomenology of femaleness and maleness, respectively, we observe that in the modern Occident the notion of *ritual masculinity* is native only to selected anthropological and mythic representations—it typically resides “elsewhere.” More importantly, many American commentators simply equate the function of ritual to that of *markers, milestones, or tests* of status acquisition, or of *bestowal* of privilege. Hence, mythology is a necessary resource of any conceptualization of Western masculinity but it does not invoke a ritual (other than ceremonial) paradigm of engagement. In many societies “initiation rituals” only preface or conclude months or years of instruction and training, not unlike Western schooling which disregards gender by policy. In Africa, boys’ initiation seasons are scheduled in school vacations, while American “wilderness programs” for boys typically take place on weekends. So what do these non-mandatory rituals accomplish if their very schedule obeys the schedule of mandatory agogical institutes that officially de-escalate gender as a personal, or metaphysical, drama?

The phenomenology of “the masculine” as artifice and accomplishment is a myth: it requires mythological referencing. Hence it is not a “phenomenon,” rather it is wide-feeding and eclectic mythography — “culture,” then, but hardly ontological
or psychological necessity. Barry Stephenson (2003) argues that the heroic, mythopoetic basis of neoritual programs hints at a circular relation between myth and praxis that actually denies context and purpose (divorcing ontological necessity from functional necessity), besides raising serious questions of cultural appropriation.

If ethnographic referencing is the crux of masculinity reimagined, as it seems to be in the American experience, can we indeed distill a uniformly productive image? Some elements associated with male rituals do not seem to be effective in symbolization other than qualification (endurance or performance tests), purification of feminine pollutants (New Guinean nose-bleeding) or elimination of feminine redundancies (Jewish bris milah). For anthropologists “initiation” may seem too premised on the fate of the persona, and inappropriate to encompass indigenous projections of ritual efficacy, for instance maintenance or continuance of an order, circle or line of men tied together through a space and locality imbued with transcendental significance or transgenerational objectives. In the contemporary reading initiation often signals a Western and specifically American projection of preoccupations with psychology and gender.

Analytic intrusion and ethical imperatives
In secular Occidental understanding lacking a paradigmatic embrace of and therefore relying on an analytic approach to the phainomenon (Eliade was critical here), ritual is ostensibly a more complete, more potent, less negotiable way of articulating ideas of masculinity as trajectory rather than an essence, a trait, a given. However we note that the contemporary analytic notion of “masculinity” is perfused by constructionist, performativist and (pro-)feminist arguments for mutability and contingency; hence, what may be articulated in indigenous practices such as ritualization of life stages is at risk of being reduced, or enhanced, to what is being construed as analytically mobilizing, or even: politically fashionable.

On a more profound level, it has been argued that “male embodiment is deeply sedimented in the sociological imaginary as the very condition of social action and the constituent of social agency” (Witz and Marshall, 2003, p. 339). Masculinity may be as implicated in analytic as in religious performance, the caveat being that the phenomenon may be best observed in the perception of the phenomenon. Current research often instrumentalizes an anticonservative and antihegemonic ethos vis-à-vis masculinity, either by signaling hopeful developments or criticizing ominous ones. Such may be a general trend in considering the intersection of masculinity and spirituality as a pedagogical or life course issue. In a recent study Kathleen Engebretson (2006) concludes that a key component of Melbourne 15 to 18-year-old boys’ spirituality is “a growing tendency to challenge the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, and to look towards a future where masculinity is defined in more varied and fulfilling ways” (p. 91).

Masculinity’s phenomenological mobility, then, may be crucially implicated in its projected ethical mobility. Masculinization and gender specificity are thematic foci so demanding in the post-second wave feminism West that it may effectively monopolize the phenomenology of passage, reducing it to an exploration of (e.g. psycho-)analytic theory or ethical imperative rather than having it emerge from emic (natively articulated) ontologies and rationalizations. This is androcentrism, but at a
more aggressive level than as discussed by Valerie Saiving (1976).

Turner argued that liminality and passage were structural features of many rituals quite divorced from the question of whether they produced a masculine subject, whether they were male-centered, and whether these were, natively or analytically, “initiations” — other than lending themselves for Arnold Van Gennep’s (1909) triptych of passage. Such may compromise the surprising element in André Droogers’ (1980) observation while studying Wagenia (Zaire) boys’ initiation, that symbols indicating the temporal marginal position of persons undergoing the ritual were also used in the biographies of male religious innovators. This would support a structural thesis akin to that of Campbell’s monomyth, but only at the cost of extreme analytic condensation. Droogers consciously disregards the question of the site of symbolic instantiation, and thus seems simply to affirm, rather than analyze, the suggested universality of plot elements.

‘Initiation’: Allegoric necessity

For an important part analytic intrusion is metaphoric intrusion. In textbook and pop anthropology metaphors of advancement in male trajectories are used mostly without reflection and commonly seem to allow, contra the anthropological gendering observed earlier in this paper, far-reaching gender neutrality. Expressions specific to diverse literary and media domains within the Euro-American experience include coming-of-age, passage, Bildung, initiation, becoming, development, approximation, arrival (“reaching” [manhood]), attainment, abandonment, giving up [childish obsessions], leaving [childhood] behind, [identity] formation, completion, among others. Whatever these tropes are thought or meant to accomplish, they are not analytically irreducible. What we have here is narration not determination, emplotment not description.

This mobility and agency of words meet resistance given the (radical) situation of qualitative anthropologists, rather than psychologists, being interested in transition as a trope, protocol, or narrative, and hence in its place in wider metaphorical, discursive, and organizational realms.

In native languages names for “initiations” are variably abstract metaphorical assessments of the projected goals, whether or not synecdochic. Commonly they are gendered metaphors. For instance, a Tabiteuan male ritual for boys (Gilbert Islands; Luomala, 1980, pp. 223-6) is named “te kaunaki or te kaun (the making ‘wild’ or ‘angry’ — aggressive, courageous, high-spirited); te koreaki or te korean atuna (the being cut or the cutting of the head); and te bekau (the working-at)” also named te kana-ni-m’aane (the diet of a full-grown man) because for the first time the youth — presumably when the ritual ends — receives a man’s diet.” In apparent contrast, a Xhosa boy’s spirit would have to be “tamed” subduing his animal (“dog,” “bull”) lack of restraint, his being “still partly in the realm of nature” rather than that of society (Mayer and Mayer, 1990, pp. 36-8). Bororó initiation is metaphorically accomplished by cooking, roasting, preparing by heat, thus: hardening (incidentally also among PNG Mianmin). “Cooking is a cultural process, and the boys in the initiation ceremonies are made cultural by being ‘cooked.’ When the decision for an initiation ceremony has been made, the men say, ‘Let us cook the boys’ (pawo ipare ekowu)” (Levak, 1973, p. 195; cf. Fabian, 1992, pp. 36, 221). Frederick Lamp (1978) describes the rabai initiation of Temne boys as “an existential transition from a state of flux to
a state of stability symbolized by the slimy frog and the stately prince, a metaphor suggested by a broad body of data” (p. 38). According to Beidelman, a Ngulu expression for circumcision is “to eat”:

thus, the knife blade eats or devours (chadya) the boy. The idea of eating and consuming also has some negative associations with killing or subjecting a quarry, a connotation consistent with the usage here [...]. Thus, Ngulu sing: “The cutting of the knife eats (my) father and eats me” (Kigola mankenya chadya tate name chandya). (Beidelman, 1965, p. 144)

Ritual, to summarize, can be seen as the occasioning of narrative, hence requiring an ethnolinguistic approach. Considering my introductory notes above, I find that there are many problems in the mere appellation of the phenomenon under examination. Both directional metaphors, the etymological roots trans-ire and in-ire inform general anthropological descriptors for social customs that may or may not indigenously be understood in terms of these metaphors. In other words, in-going and through- or over-going may or may not be the preferred or most salient emic ramifications of customary observances classifiable as “initiations” or “transitions” by anthropological routine. In-ire proposes the notion of a space or realm containing presence and mobility, rather than alternative appellations such as “commencement” of role, observance or duty. In-ire seems more agentic than inducere; initiation seems to imply an act of ingression, while introduction seems to imply an experience of being resituated. Passage implies thresholds or obstacles. Transition seems more profound, more dramatic, than initiation. Transformation rather than transition or transcendence, seems to reference forma rather than space, locus or substance: a different ontology is referenced.

Anthropologists, then, could focus on “how [‘initiation’] rites are transformational, and not merely transitional” (Heald, 1982, p. 16) while being sensitive to indigenous ramifications. It should be obvious that the status of, for instance, peripubescent circumcision as a culturally salient operator on “the boy,” “the male body” and/or masculinity cannot be explicated simply by looking at its politico-jural implications nor by seeing how social roles and relationships are transfigured in the ritual. Also, absence of ritual may be thought of as producing “hyper” masculine performances by turning a clash of filial and generational interests into a political battle (Murphy, 1983).

Elsewhere (Janssen, 2007) I argue that attention to specific uses of qualifiers like boy aid in a deconstruction of masculinity as a life style, a ludic moment; or conversely of its essentialization, in terms of some developmentalist proposition of masculinity as a critical accomplishment. Contemporary Western discourses of male life stages shed a light on gender as a project, style or mode of positioning, and thus inform a constructionist, consumer or performance plot of its development. The process of ritualized un-boy-ing usually entails aspects of defeminization and masculinization, but more generally it advances guiding tropes by which trajectories become meaningful. These tropes are variable cross-culturally, as they articulate the local interplay of all three social categories (“the boy”—man—the feminine) that inform the vector boy. A ritualization of these categories relaxes a politicization of
filial (and one may venture, Oedipal) interests, but this would obviously only work in an environment where ritual has charismatic monopoly.

Whether this becomes apparent at all in ethnographic studies obviously depends on the degree of analytic sensitivity to which “the boy” is subjected. Genres of anthropological writing, taking their cue mainly from psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, are known to have introduced a range of metaphors where they could have been sensitive to native forms of allegorization.

**Necessary and exclusive masculinity/maleness in ritual**

Only a portion of “male cults” proper and only a portion of rituals exclusively observed by men are analytically “initiation cults” proper. It should be noted that what might be called *male initiation* is often a small “inaugural” (another metaphor) part of long ritual cycles (examples include the *hevehe* of the Elema, the *ais am* of the Bimin Kuskusmin, and the *kugo* of the Rukuba). Elsewhere “initiation” can be most fruitfully analyzed only as a part of <<birth complex—“initiatory” complex—marital complex—death complex—(rebirth)>> trajectories theoretically spanning the full life course (and often beyond), however subject to historical resignifications. In that sense ritual could make Campbellian “nature’s vehicles” of all participants, even if males’ logistic role is crucial; this is indeed confirmed in a subset of rituals.

There remains the question of how ritual is masculinizing, and how this is culturally considered a necessity. One might think of analytically distinguishing four categories of ritual in which masculinity is articulated: (1) rituals referring to or on behalf of young males (e.g. observances enacted in their physical absence, prior to their conception, or during states of mental or social incompetence, thereby promoting or promulgating male status); (2) rituals or observances in which males participate but that do not operate on or foreground their sex or gender based status other than requiring such as status (e.g. as “young males” or as “boys” *per se*); (3) age-stratified “rituals of boyhood” or “rituals of manhood” (foregrounding participation roles as restricted to gender-specific age strata but not modifying gendered status other than affirming, acknowledging or signifying it as such); and (4) “transition rituals” proper (substantially modifying or ending status associated with a gender-specific age stratum usually by effecting, testing, measuring, legally granting or formalizing an indigenous status akin to that of “man”). We should further ask political and ontological questions, for instance whether “relative status” may be too individualizing, and how eventual ritual centrality may be imagined in relation to, for instance, the symbolic or magical masculinization/defeminization of the body seen in many rituals.

An example of the first class is the Orthodox and Conservative Jewish custom of *pidyon haben* “Redemption of the Son,” the ritual in which parents redeem their first-born son and “buy him back” for five *sela’im* of silver or its equivalent from a Kohen (priest) in accordance to Exodus 13:1. Although this symbolic negotiation requires the child to be male, it does not specifically foreground his maleness and outside of his usual presence does not require any form of participation (according to custom the child is 31 days of age). Other examples include the prepartal Hindu rite *Pumsavana* observed to promote male birth, the Swiss and Jewish custom to
plant a gender-specific species of tree for newborns (apple-trees and cedars for boys, respectively), among others.

Examples of the second category abound in world religions. In Thailand temple boys (เด็กวัด, *dek wat*) live in monasteries and assist the monks and *samaneras* “novices.” The temple boys carry the alms bowls of the monks during the morning alms collection, and subsequently prepare the monks’ food before eating the leftovers themselves. Although the boys’ participation seems merely facilitating, they are required to follow the ten precepts for monastic life, receive religious and moral instruction, and some eventually are ordained as monks. The status of temple boys in ritualism may be compared to that of novices proper. In Burma/Myanmar boys undergo *shinpyu* “novitiation” to become a *koyin* “novice.” This ordination requires a candidate to be male but does not reference (let alone foreground, test or cultivate) their masculinity or maleness, and proposes no absolute requirement for age. Burmese Buddhist women are not qualified candidates for entering Nirvana, and to be a woman is considered “a result of bad karma in the past life” (Ling, 2005, p. 52). However, every Buddhist boy should become a novice monk for at least a week (formerly, 3 *wa*) before age 20, the eligible age of ordination as a *bhikku* “monk,” after which the candidate will be called *navaka* “new one.” It is said that if a boy is old enough to “drive away a bird that comes to pick the food from one’s meal, or scare birds away from the farm,” he can become a novice. *Shinpyu*, then, introduces a male into a male-defined institute and a masculinist projection of sacred space, and it does effect a transition, but does not seem to operate on “masculinity” *per se*. According to John Brohm (1963, pp. 161, 164), while a candidate is “re-born a man” shinpyu would be “not so much a means for the young boy to gain Buddhist knowledge through token participation in the monastic life as it is a mystical means of crossing a social and spiritual threshold that separates one phase of life from another.” We are left, then, with individual anthropologists’ insistence on “life phase,” which often remains an unanchored notion analytically.

Examples of customs that centralize but do not operate on the status of “boys” are numerous. In Japan *Tango no Sekku* (Feast of Flags/Banners, Boys’ Festival) celebrated the health of boys as part of the *Gosekku* “Five Festival” annual cycle. By means of the 1948 *Public Holiday Law*, the government decreed this day, renamed *Kodomo no hi* “Children’s Day,” to be a national holiday to celebrate the happiness of all children and to express gratitude towards mothers. Originally however the event was called *Shobu no Sekku* after the Japanese iris plant (*shobu*) whose name is a homonym for the phrase “win or lose.” The *shobu* has sword-shaped leaves with medicinal properties. *Shobu* are placed under the eaves to fend off evil, and *shobu* leaf baths are taken to protect boys’ health and render them fearless. The event spread among the samurai caste of the Kamakura period, then May 5th was officially settled as an important date by the feudal government of the Edo period, celebrating the birth of a son in a samurai family with decorative flags and streamers put up in front of the main gate on that day. The custom gradually spread across social strata and tied to the putting up of carp streamers (*koi-nobori*), and fabrication of paper feudal helmets (*kabuto*) and dolls. According to John Finnemore, referencing two great old rival clans of the feudal days,
Toys provided for their [parents’] sons at the Feast of Flags were helmets, flags, swords, bows and arrows, coats of mail, spears, and the like. The Feast of Flags itself is held on the day sacred to Hachima [Bishamon-ten?], the Japanese God of War, and the favorite game on that day is a mimic battle. (Finnemore, 1913, unpaginated)

The ritual was said to scare off Oni, an evil-disposed god coming down from the heavens to devour boys. Historically, then, the festival, which had its equivalent Sekku for girls in Hina matsuri “Dolls’ Festival,” refers explicitly to male-born offspring (and male birth), perpetuating their wellbeing and grooming their ability in male pursuits (to do battle), but it does not operate on boys as a social category or stratum. A distinction should be noted here with the originally Confucian capping ceremonies, announcing legal male maturity, called kakan no gi or Genpuku (元服 Japan), Guan li (冠禮 China) and Gwallye (관례 Korea) for which female pendants existed with clearly differentiating functions. However, the requirement for capping was reportedly chronometric age (though modulating with class) and capping primarily constituted the legal acknowledgement of maturity, not its fabrication per se.

Other instances of ritualization can be said to operate on male/masculine life trajectories as such but as shinpyu they often primarily reference superordinate, abstract, or structural objectives, often projected in terms of gender, that rely on these trajectories for their continuance, stability and momentum: the metaphysical realm (e.g. Dreamtime), the patriline, social order, political status quo, religious institutes, “ethos,” “custom.” In cases, the creation of manhood may be an explicit yet partial objective nestled within a much more pervasive sacred or cyclical system that, though rooted in staged membership, is thought to transcend all contemporaneous life courses. Indigenous notions of mature maleness or masculinity, then, may be a relative or partial objective and/or a partial effect of ritual.

Delimiting and historicizing ritual efficacy

Central has been the question of how one is to conceptualize the work of ritual, how it operates on reality. Droogers (2004) uses the example of Wagenia boys’ initiation to argue that ritual can be productively seen as an “enjoyable form of playing with realities. More than a solemn occasion, useful because of its social and cultural functions [...] a festive enactment of a counterreality” (p. 138). If we look how “the sacred” is accomplished in rituals mostly exclusive to males, we immediately require analytic delimitation of our subject, an example being “rites of terror” (Whitehouse, 1996). We can look into the cultural necessity of terror although, unfortunately, terror is not specific to ritual, nor to initiation, nor to male initiation. Theories then do not apply to violence in ritual, or in initiation rituals, per se. In general, initiations that do entail terrorization generally begin with a violent assault upon the bodies of novices, symbolizing the overwhelming power and transcendence of the social/sacred realm over earthly vitality only to bring us back into “this world” somehow invigorated by the powers we have absorbed (Bloch, 1992 cited in
Whitehouse, 1996). According to Pascal Boyer (2001), the main purpose of ritual terror lies in its testing the loyalty of members of endangered coalitions in circumstances where the costs of failure are not too damaging to the group. Yet, loyalty connotes the choice of non-participation and voluntariness, and often this is compromised in initiation. Whitehouse instead offers the idea that where rituals lack normal cues for reading intentionality in its actors (called “theory of mind,” TOM), as in the case of arousal coupled with shocks of a cognitive nature, a search for ritual exegesis is triggered. Terror connotes the creation of so-called “episodic” memories which, when relived, are liable to become a focus for conscious rumination, often over many years or even a lifetime, eventually resulting in highly motivating religious ideologies, typically idiosyncratic and hard to convey in words but nevertheless deeply implicated in the formation of attitudes and beliefs.

This theory requires an interpretational deprivation on the part of novices, and ultimately applies to a small set of communities. The assessment of generalized functionalist claims (e.g. Schlegel and Barry, 1991) furthermore begs for historical analyses, especially a contextual focus on eventual demise or revitalization of rituals. A cultural sense of ritual necessity of course should be strongly informed by arguments for ritual continuity. Ritual demise may be experienced as a loss, triggering or articulating a “poetics of ritual”:

Although the ranks of the gurna [traditional socialization society] had thinned, youth initiation had been banned for three decades, and wrestling has diminished, male Tupuri [Cameroon] youth still located the core of Tupuri socialisation, and thus manhood, in these cultural practices. Even though lycée students have not had the chance to experience these rites of passage—or maybe because they haven’t—they expressed a sense of loss. (Ignatowski, 2004, p. 427)

While one could argue that a range of factors could explain secularization or revitalization, one must say this analysis critically informs indigenous discourses of ritual necessity. Peter Carstens (1982, pp. 518, 521) for instance locates the continuity of Xhosa male ritual in the continuity of male dominance in household subsistence from animal husbandry and agriculture to institutionalized migrant labor. He also hints at another scenario: among the Tswana male initiation was superseded in form by labor migration. Furthermore Nama male initiation seemed to have lapsed when males ceased to make a notable contribution to subsistence activities in the 19th century, yet it was not reinvented when they became involved in the migrant labor system. Zolani Ngwane (2001) adds that through cash from migrant labor, South African rural household heads exercised power over the domestic economies. Ideologically this power translated into the symbolic articulation of two institutions of social reproduction, the school and initiation rite, such that the educated and potentially alienated subjects yielded by the former were to be resocialized through the latter into local subjects of the chief and sons of their fathers. However, with rising unemployment rates since the 1980s, the older men lost the material base for their monopoly over this symbolic structure.

These examples (for comparable analyses of ritual discontinuity see Freeman, 2002 and Knauff, 2003) may suggest rituals reference complex historical
developments that seem to resist easy archetypes for sheer lack of continuity in symbolic capital even in seemingly uncontested interludes of ritualization.

Further themes obviously include historical instances of sex-exclusivity of ritual, or of eventual suspension of such exclusivity; the situation of ritual allowing both boy and girl novices; sex-specific rituals with opposite-sex pendant rituals. Not just the content of rituals but specifically their (often indigenously debated) myths of origin will illuminate imaginations of necessary continuity. At the very least mythopoets could realize that ritual efficacy cannot be theorized on the basis of a mere acknowledgement of “universality” per se (as argued, articulations of ritual deprivation seem more pertinent anthropologically to discourses of cultural efficacy). Claims for ritual necessity, moreover, can never be substantiated by appropriation, or “recognition,” of some cross-culturally common denominator. Curricular appropriation of the very concept of ritualization, in any case, may necessarily imply a problematic (albeit effective or “hegemonic”) ontology of masculinity, this problem being its inherently imagined mobility.

Conclusion

In the West one notes an intense but ambivalent interest in ritual in the ostensible absence of a ritual paradigm in non-elite male trajectories. Its work lies in the discursive mobility and mutability of constructions, rather than the political ordering and continuity, of masculine performance, and indeed, of performances as masculine. Both analytic and poetic ambition, however, have opted for extreme abstractions that assume, rather than distil from observations, the idea of initiation as a male necessity and masculine Gestalt. However, in the West this idea has been premised on ontological closure informed by (developmental) psychology and ethical commitments to gender, and thus it risks disregarding the manifold ways and paradigms in which masculinity may be imagined or cultivated or implicated in ritual: necessarily or otherwise.

References


Notes

1 See McKinney (2003) for further notes.

2 Alves’ discussion of transgressive backyard rampages held occasionally among urban Portuguese 9 to 10-year-old boys, were reportedly considered subjectively as enhancing status and knowledge, thus as “practice for adulthood.” Their being considered “initiation rites,” however, could only be accomplished by Alves’ structuralist interpretation and ethnological ramification of its features. And although the transgression in question would be considered “compulsory if a boy wanted to increase his power and status within the peer group” (p. 898), nowhere can it be inferred that the transgressions or their post hoc narration actually accomplished, or even referenced, the observed official (i.e. scholastic and gender-neutral) “stages of maturation” (p. 897) which here would entail not the advent of manhood but a schism between emic “late childhood” and “adolescence.” The fin-de-siècle notion of adolescence, however, is strongly tied in with normative assumptions of “personal,” “individual” and “psychosocial” growth and stabilization. This period is observed in a commonly ungendered and ontologically delimited plot of trans-ition—“going through a phase.” The cross-cultural and historical variance in these assumptions and formulations remains unstudied by cross-culturalists who rely on numeric data. If anything this method’s premise of commensurability relies to a significant degree on historical immutability, consensus, conceptual constancy and ethnographic accuracy. Hence it risks erasing the salience of eventual native controversy, historical dynamism, semantic ambiguity, and context.

3 As I write, a South African TV drama depicting Xhosa circumcision rites is being taken off air after causing a furor among traditional leaders, who say the program...
“infringes on a sacred tradition” by disclosing too much, especially to women. (SABC pulls contentious drama on circumcision. Pretoria News, April 2 2007, p. 3).

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The Homosexual Subject: Coming-Out as a Political Act

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Drawing on Lacan’s notion of the subject as a split and his four discursive forms, this paper identifies and examines three moments inherent to the coming out narratives. It is shown that two such moments, manifested as two forms of discourse—the hysteric’s discourse and the master’s discourse, open the possibility of political actions. The former adheres to a perpetual position to interrogating the established social-symbolic order, whereas, the latter completes the steps of constituting and recognizing oneself in a new master’s interpellation. The author then examines the form of and limitations to the political gestures entailed by the social constructionism and queer theory concerning the coming out processes: the social constructionist’s insistence on completing the master’s discourse and the queer gesture of rejecting any master and keeping the symbolic-ideological space open.

The act of coming out marks a significant phase in the formation of the homosexual subjectivity, both for the individual and for the formation of gay/lesbian communities. In social sciences and humanities, two paradigms have dominated the research of homosexuality and the formation of homosexual subjectivity and identities: the constructionist approach and queer theory (deconstructionist approach), though some more or less conventional sociological approaches such as symbolic interactionism, dramaturgical approach, and conflict theories have also fared well. Social constructionist studies of homosexuality, according to Steven Seidman (1996 p. 9), reject essentialism that locates homosexuality in human’s biological makeup and directs research interests and efforts to the social factors and processes that shape the homosexual identity and community. The queer theorist on the other hand argues against any approach that remains within the symbolic space of binary social categories such as man and woman, male and female, heterosexuality and homosexuality, natural and unnatural, which organize the social knowledge/power of contemporary capitalist system and are sustained through performativity-reiteration (Butler, 1993). The act of coming out thus functions differently in the two universes of social constructionism and queer theory: as a process of negotiating and constituting certain homosexual identities in the former and as a (failed) performing of social categories in the latter.
In both paradigms, the notion of subject/subjectivity is probably one of the least clearly defined concepts. In the social constructionist’s works the subject is usually equated to the sense of self that is correlative to an identity occupying a certain structural position(s). The queer theorist tends to view the subject as an effect of the Althusserian interpellation (Althusser, 1971), a product of performativity of social, political, and legal powers (Butler, 1993), which hail the individual into a subject and at the same time subjects her to an order of power. The difficulty for social constructionism lies in its treatment of the coming out individual as always already homosexual who only needs to negotiate a certain identity, a membership in a community or group. For the queer theorist, the trouble inheres in the queering gesture that endeavors to de-subjectivize the subject, asserting the ever failing performative, and refusing “any positing of a proper subject” (Eng et al., 2005, p. 3). However, the result of both constructionist and deconstructionist/queer gestures turn out to be “the Thing” that is respectively either a surplus or a remainder of the two discursive acts. In other words, the constructionist gesture, which directs attention to the formation of socially constituted identities that represent new spaces of opposition to the dominant power, already presupposes that which is represented. The paradox that representation presupposes its own represented is the hidden truth of the subject apparently not noticeable to the social constructionist. On the other hand, the queer/deconstructionist gesture, in its uncompromising insistence on understanding gender-sexuality as the effects of performativity-recitation of social identities and their imaginary bodily images (Butler, 1993, p.12-16), leaves a remainder that is the very Thing that fails to be subjectivized. In the Lacanian framework, the surplus-product and the remainder resulted from the above two gestures are precisely the split-subject (Lacan, 1971[2007]; Fink, 1995; Žižek, 1998), which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

In this paper, I employ the Lacanian concept of the split-subject and Lacan’s theory on the four discourses (Lacan, 1991[2007]; Žižek, 1998) that correspond to four forms of the subject (Žižek, 1998) to analyze a corpus of coming-out narratives collected from the Internet. My analysis focuses on narrated experiences of youth because coming out is for them not only an extra “burden” of socialization but also an opportunity for creating new forms of subjectivity. Furthermore, the normative heterosexual masculinity is a rigid (foreclosed) hegemonic power whose grip is much stronger on male youth than men of more or less social establishment. The purpose of the analyses, however, is not to address the coming out process per se and its effects or outcomes and the analysis is not a systematic one that covers the full range of the corpus. Instead my focus is on the discursive modes and moments of coming out narratives and the subsequent subjective experiences of coming out individuals. Moreover, I treat coming out acts as discursive gestures that may create different political and ethical consequences. Therefore, the quotes from the narratives are only for purpose of illustration. Moreover, because both social constructionist and queer/deconstructionist approaches contain strong political motifs, I then examine the moments in the coming out process as political spaces where the constructionist and queer theoretical approaches have had their impacts. In the same Lacanian framework the political limitation of both approaches are discussed.
The splitting of the subject and the closet

Lacan’s (1975[1998], p. 49) thesis that the signifier represents a subject to another signifier is to be understood in terms of the correlation between the subject and the signifier. In Lacan’s own words, “[T]he subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers” (1975[1998], p. 50). The Lacanian quasi-mathematical formula $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ demonstrates the sliding of the signifiers, in which the meanings of $S_1$, the master signifier, depends on the differentiation and deference in a system of knowledge, namely $S_2$. The subject emerges when $S_1$ is retroactively posited as the quilting point (What Bruce Fink (2004, pp. 89-90) calls the button tie) that stops the sliding of the chain of signifiers. A good illustration at hand of this argument is the term queer. Contrary to what the queer theorist argues, that “queer” is a non-identity that refers to no stable social categories and thus subversive to dominant gender, sexual, and racial discourses, it nonetheless occupies a position that integrates the various marginal or transgressive gender, sexual, and racial identities that have emerged in opposition to the dominant social discourses. One lesson we can learn from the queer theorist is that precisely because the concept of queer is empty (emptied), means nothing and everything marginal and transgressive, it can serve as a master signifier. Ernesto Laclau (1996) in his well-known thesis on the death and resurrection of the theory of ideology addresses precisely the two discursive gestures in ideological hegemonization: emptying of a signifier in order for it to function as a master signifier, and equivalencing (In Lacan’s words, sliding) of signifiers. Slavoj Žižek’s discussion of contemporary environmentalist struggles present yet another example: contemporary environmentalism is a political arena open to ideological competition and our knowledge of environmental crises is rendered meaningful through master signifiers such as humanism, anti-capitalism (socialism), and feminism. In other words, there is no environmentalism as such. All existing environmentalisms rely on certain master signifiers such as humanist environmentalism, socialist environmentalism or feminist environmentalism (Žižek, 1996, p. 128; 1989, p. 88).

This leads to yet another crucial point in the Lacanian school: there is no other of the Other. Here the Other (with a capital O) refers to the symbolic order. “There is no other of the Other” means that there is no support that sustains the social symbolic order except through the act of stating-reiterating it (Žižek, 2005, pp. 50-1). In the field of sexuality studies, this can only mean that there is no sexuality as such. Sexuality as a domain open to social-ideological hegemonization is always already quilted by some master signifiers; for instance, the “normative” heterosexuality anchored on the institution of family, or the sexuality whose meanings depend on modern scientific knowledge. It is in this sense that the Lacanian School is fundamentally anti-essentialist. Different from the deconstructionist, the Lacanian does not reject the notion of a “hard reality” but points to the dimension of the real. The Lacanian “real” is located in the gaps between different symbolic orders, the gap between plausible perspectives (Žižek, 2006). Put differently, the Lacanian “real” refers to that which resists any signification evidenced by the irreducible gaps among various discursive constructions of reality.
Consequently, the Lacanian subject is attached to the master signifier and the knowledge it relies on. The variations in the subject consist in the variable relations between the subject, the master signifier, and knowledge/meaning system, and the object. What is worth emphasizing here is the retroactive gesture that poses the master signifier and the consequent emergence of the subject. The master signifier is always retroactively posited, which in turn integrates a whole field of meanings so that things become what they always have been (Žižek, 1989, pp. 101-2). With regard to this argument, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Epistemology of the Closet (1990) presents an excellent example. Homosexual practices, cultural symbols, and even social organizations had always existed. However, it was not until after the Stonewall revolt and the subsequent gay/lesbian movements that gay/lesbian identities started to render a whole field of knowledge in the closet publicly meaningful. In other words, gay/lesbian identities functioned as master signifiers that wove (underground) symbolic systems into one coherent set of meanings. It is within such a system that Sedgwick’s argument that modern Western knowledge, literature, and arts had always relied on the dichotomous categories of heterosexual and homosexual is to be understood. It is also in this sense that the homosexual subject emerges as a result of gay/lesbian identities coming to integrate a set of signifiers that have always existed. It is only in retrospect that one can entertain the illusion that the homosexual subject has always been. At the personal level, this retroaction marks one crucial moment in the coming out process.

If the Lacanian subject were merely an identity whose contents are determined by its structural positions and signified features, then the so-called Lacanian subject would not be different from a constructionist or deconstructionist conception of subjectivity. The other side of the Lacanian subject can be understood in two seemingly paradoxical ways. First, it is the hard kernel of one’s being that forever resists symbolic integration. In other words, I am always more than the totality of my social roles, identities, statuses, goals, and relations. There is no enumeration of my social traits that would fully represent me as a human being. Second, this hard kernel of me is at the same time the effect of exclusion that any totalizing social symbolic order has to perform to achieve its coherency. It is only when I am included in the social symbolic order that I find myself excluded at the same time. The notion of “the closet” captures precisely this other side of the Lacanian subject. No wonder Sedgwick defines closet-ness as initiated through a performance of silence (1990, p. 3). Silence here bears witness to the fact that there is something in me that is unspeakable because it is absent or suppressed within the (normative) symbolic order. Meanwhile it is precisely because of my participation in the social performance that the unspeakable Thing comes into being as the excluded.

The Lacanian subject, represented by one signifier to some other signifiers and at the same time appearing as a split between inclusion and exclusion, is then shown as follows in a Lacanian formula:

$$\frac{S_1}{\mathcal{G}} \longrightarrow \frac{S_2}{\alpha}$$

*Figure 1: The Lacanian subject and the master’s discourse*
The lower left sign of $\mathcal{X}$ is the Lacanian subject represented by $S_0$, the master signifier, to $S_2$, the system of knowledge hegemonized by $S_1$. What is worth reiterating is that the subject is always a split between the signifier (the symbolic) that represents it and suppresses it at the same time. One should be cautious not to interpret the suppressed or excluded of the symbolic order as anything substantial. The split is the suppression or exclusion as such. Regarding sexuality, the real Thing, the real object-cause of sexual desire does not exist—sexuality as such has no substantial support; actual sexualities are always the products of social symbolic order, made possible through one’s “forced” choice for or submission to the Law. It should be noted that this argument differs from the deconstructionist’s rejection of any foundation of sexuality. The thin line that separates the Lacanian from the deconstructionist is the Lacanian “real,” the fundamental antagonism of sexuality and one’s traumatic encounter with it that resists totalizing symbolic signification. In other words, sexuality is not merely some social construct ex nihilo. The real of sexuality is a fundamental antagonism that forever resists full signification.

The split subject in coming out narratives

How then is the split-subject represented in coming out narratives? Furthermore, how does the split-subject function as modalities of the coming out act? Different from the typical sociological analyses of self-identity formation through narratives and identification processes, in which the individual organizes, negotiates, and constructs stories to render her/his experiences coherent and meaningful, the Lacanian framework redirects one’s attention to the moment of the emergence of the subject and its splitting. In this section, I rely on the Lacanian framework of subjectivity and Greimas’ elementary narrative model (Greimas, 1966[1983]; Schleifer et al., 1992) to analyze a corpus of coming out narratives to address three moments in such stories.²

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2. Greimas’ actantial model (Greimas, 1966[1983], p. 207)**

The above figure represents Greimas’ elementary narrative model. Each position implies an actant or actantial role and the set of relations among the actants. In Greimasisan narrative analysis, an actant is a semantic-narrative function to be actualized as actor(s) in specific stories. For instance, the actant of “opponent” in a fairytale could be actorialized as the villain or unfavorable natural elements (Greimas, 1966[1983]). This model contains three axes: the quest axis, the conflict axis, and the communication axis. The quest axis, which is indicated by the vertical line that goes from the subject to the (valued) object, gives rise to events related to
the changing relation between the subject and object. The lower half of the figure depicts the conflict axis between the narrative’s external actants (i.e., namely the helper or the opponent), whose activities give rise to events that respectively facilitate and impede communication or the subject’s quest.

The upper half of Figure 2 depicts the communication axis. The interactions between sender and receiver are particularly important according to Greimas (1986, but also see Schleifer et al., 1992), because they not only articulate the situation but also interject social and cultural values into the narrative. In coming-out narratives, for instance, the sender implies a community, which could either facilitate the subject’s coming out process if it is tolerant, or impede the process if it is more or less homophobic. What is of particular importance in this model with regard to the Lacanian subject is the quest axis, namely, the events concerning the relations between the subject and the object. One question immediately arises from the examination of the quest axis: what is the object of the subject’s quest in coming out narratives? How does the object function in the emergence of the homosexual subject?

In a sense, the coming out narrative can be viewed as one in which a “hero” seeks for a definition of the Object-Thing that defines her/him. This Object-Thing, contrary to what the constructionists assume in their analyses, is not merely a social identity out there, external to a presupposed subject. On the contrary, the coming out narratives typically starts with the narrator’s recognition that there is Something in me but not transparent to me. The initial splitting between the Thing in me and the “I” that perceives and is unsettled by the Thing is the very moment of the emergence of the subject. The opacity of the Object-Thing is the defining character of the first moment of the coming out narrative in general. The following passage addresses such an inner conflict:

I have always felt as though there was something else to me than what met the eye. I, since the seventh grade, would get a crush on a male schoolmate (every now and then) whom I thought to be cute. I never realized what those feelings really meant since I was, and still am, attracted to girls. I thought every guy was like me. — Robby

The narrator, who self-identifies as bisexual, explicitly writes about this “something else to me than what met the eye.” This “eye” is to be understood as one’s imagination of the Other’s gaze: how I see myself through other’s eyes. Here the difference between appearance and essence is crucial. What else could this Thing be besides my “essence,” the innermost yet alien trait that defines who I am? What I appear is merely a cover-up for what I really am. It would be mistaken to assume that the narrator understands what the defining Thing is at this moment, since “understanding” through signifying the Thing comes later through the act of identification—an act of submitting the Thing to the symbolic order. Because the Thing is not transparent to the narrator, it defines him, through its impervious yet irresistible drive. In the Lacanian framework the objectifying gesture that recognizes the Thing in oneself is the very first moment of the subject, which comes into experiences through positing an object: the positing gesture turns out to be the very split-subject. However, a careful reading would show that the Thing is only perceived
as being out there—the males that attracted the narrator, the boys on whom he had a crush. This is the Lacanian ex-timate (Žižek, 1989, p. 180); the core of one’s being is at least partially out there standing for the object-cause of desire.

The Thing, the alien object that defines the homosexual subject, is often depicted as a lack, a hole in one’s everyday routine regulated, interpreted, and supervised through the heterosexual and heterosexist symbolic order.

[i] went through high school in what seems now like a foggy haze, that never really existed. I never drank i never did drugs, i also never talked to anyone. everyone labeled me the freak, and the guys called me a faggot, it was not until high school that i ever even heard that word. it cut through me like a hot knife in butter. that word for some reason hurt me so bad. and it only made me shelter myself more. junior year, i finally started to deal with life. — Harvey

Different from the previous story, Harvey’s narrative depicts his youth years as characteristic of a lack, an absence of activities such as drinking, doing drugs, and even talking, activities that are considered “normal” within the symbolic system of excessive heterosexual masculinity. This lack—non-participation in the symbolic order functions as the object, the Thing that distinguishes the narrator from what is perceived as normalcy. From the viewpoint of the normative heterosexual social order, the lack of signs of excessive masculinity such as drinking (underage) and doing drugs is eventually interpreted as “faggot” behaviors. The fact that heterosexual youth could be labeled as faggot bears witness to the excessive and transgressive nature of masculinity. It is in this sense that masculinity is the transgressive underside of the normative heterosexual order. In Harvey’s struggles for a name of the lack he encounters what Althusser (1971) calls interpellation, an ideological call addressed at the subject. What is amazingly perspicacious about Harvey’s narrative is his metaphorical description of his feelings when called a “freak” and “faggot”—“it cut through me like a hot knife in butter.” Is this not the most illustrative picture of the Lacanian subject, a cutting that separates the individual from his un-reflected existence, an accusation addressed at one who is always already “guilty,” an injurious objectifying gesture that brings into being the subject as a cut? Hence, the emergence of the homosexual subject involves an objectifying gesture, which unfolds along the quest axis within the Greimasian narrative model. It is also this initial moment of subjectivization-objectification that gives rise to the events along the conflict and communication axis, namely, the coming out processes.

The retroactive positing of the homosexual master signifiers
From the quotes in the last section, it is seen that the subject emerges in accompany with the alien Thing with which the subject has to grapple. In this section I intend to show that it is through strife for a name of the alien Thing that the subject undergoes the process of coming out—a process of identification. In the Greimasian model, this means that events will unfold along the conflict and communication axes, oftentimes with the two axes merged as one when the “community” refuses to accept the narrator’s newly claimed identity and its message is rejection. Two
discursive forms mark the two crucial moments of the coming out process: the hysterical discourse and the master’s discourse, which, as I will argue later, present two political gestures implied in constructionism and deconstructionism/queer theory.

In Figure 2 presented above, the quest axis in the narrative model characterizes an inner split of the individual, and the quest of the protagonist in coming out narratives is primarily one for bridging (erasing) the gap between the subject and the object. It should be stated here that the Lacanian position on the issue of subjectivization is that the subject, once emerged, never recovers from the cut. To be more precise, the cut is the subject whose wound can be concealed under a master signifier once a decision of submission to the symbolic is made. Thus for the Lacanian, identification always involves a conscious decision, which opens the space for political and ethical actions. The immediate question following this argument is, “what if one rejects the master signifier presented to her/him?” In other words and to be more specific, what if one refuses to identify with the master signifiers immediately available and embraces one’s objectness? The answer lies in one of Lacan’s four discourses (Lacan, 1991[2007]; Žižek, 1998): the hysterical’s discourse.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\mathcal{S} \\
\alpha
\end{array}
\longrightarrow
\begin{array}{c}
S_1 \\
S_2
\end{array}
\]

*Figure 3 Lacan’s hysterical’s discourse*

The hysterical’s discourse proposed by Lacan in his seminar XVII depicts a form of discourse in which the subject addresses a question to the Master (understood as the dominant symbolic order): why am I what you say I am? The small \( \alpha \) in the lower left corner of the figure is Lacan’s infamous objet petit \( \alpha \) (the small object of \( \alpha \), which stands for the very object-cause of one’s desire, the core of one’s being that resists signification, the “je ne sais quoi” that defines me as unique (Lacan, 1991[2007])). In the coming out narratives this marks the second moment of the process, the moment when the narrator directs her/his question at the dominant heterosexual social symbolic order: why am I what you say I should be?

*Kids used to tease each other so carelessly by saying “that’s so gay!” or “get away, gay fag!”*. Truth be told, I also said those words at times. But I didn’t know it applied to my sexuality. When I got into 6th grade, I realized that I was different, but not gay. I remember walking down the halls and seeing the football players making out with the most popular girls. The guys holding hands with their girls. But never once did I see two guys enjoying a kiss, or even holding hands. I always felt like I was different and rare at the age of 12. I went around acting the straightest I could. When I was with my family out in public, I would stare at a beautiful woman for no reason other than to make myself look straight. And later that day, I would cry myself to sleep, asking God with tears why I was the way I was. — David

The above passage, a rare detailed account of one’s experiences before coming out in the collection of narratives, clearly illustrates the relations between the dominant
heterosexist social symbolic order and the homosexual subject that rejects the name “gay fag” perceived as part of the symbolic universe. What is noteworthy is the fact that later in his life the narrator does embrace the identity of gay when the same identity is perceived as belonging to a different social symbolic order, the assertive and affirmative gay/lesbian discourses. However, at the point of his life quoted above, the narrator associates the same identity, namely “gay fag” with the heterosexist discourse according to which he is forced to act. The fundamental difference between the two symbolic orders lies in the position the gay identity occupies: in the heterosexist order the gay identity serves as the other of the heterosexist subject, as the negative support of the order; whereas in the second, the assertive and affirmative gay/lesbian discourses, the gay identity is the master signifier that anchors an alternative symbolic network. In David’s narration above, however, his painful struggle starts with his questioning of the first symbolic order: asking God why I was the way I was. Here God stands in the place of the master signifier as the Master, or the big Other in Lacanian terms. “The way I was” is to be understood as “the way you said I was.” This is exemplary of Lacan’s discourse of the hysteric in which the hysteric subject hystericizes the Master, in this case, God. That is to say, in the hysteric’s discourse, the subject returns her/his internal split back to the Master: I am your creation against your own will. For those who are not acquainted with Lacanian works, it is worth indicating that the concept “hysteric” here ought not to be taken as diagnose of mental pathology. Instead, it is a form of social interaction whose function is precisely to hystericize the Master, to displace the master to the position of the other (the upper right position in Figures 1 and 3) from the agent’s position (upper left). By occupying the agent’s position, the hysteric effectively places the Master to the impotent position of the other, and any gesture of outrage or violence (gay bashing for example) bears further witness to the fact that the Master has lost its power as virtual coercion. From the perspective of the subject, this discursive gesture is a rejection of the imposed identity, a refusal to recognize the interpellation. This is the moment of the pure Lacanian subject, a split as such, a gesture of negation that cannot be grounded in any (pathological) rational calculation. This is also what it means to reject the Master signifier.

Then comes the final moment of the coming out process, when the gay/lesbian identity is accepted as the master signifier of a new symbolic order. The instability of the hysteric’s discourse is replaced by a normalized affirmative gay/lesbian discourse. In the master’s discourse (see Figure 1), the split subject recognizes him/herself in the master signifier (S1) and its related meaning-knowledge system (S2). What is produced (Lacan names the lower right position the product of the discourse) is the small object of a with which the subject now entertains a fantasmic relation: even though I have submitted myself to the master I can retrieve my object-cause of desire, the very core of my jouissance from the symbolic. According to Žižek (1993, pp. 165; 185) “the wound is healed only by the spear that smote you”; that is to say, the cut or the pure hysteric subject can only be healed by words, the symbolic.

The following quote is from one of those longer stories in the collection. Having struggled with his desire for men, which, Dave the narrator admits, was initially not framed sexually, he finally decided to come out, which he prefers to call “thawed out.”
In any case, I never really "came out" to myself so much as "thawed out". I remember seeing a booth for the campus g/l/b/t group my freshmen year and wanting to go up and talk to them; that was really the first time I'd ever put the 'G' word to my feelings. It wasn't until the next year that I was finally ready to make the leap from 'out to myself' to 'out'. I began corresponding very candidly with my sexuality professor about gay issues, and she was incredibly supportive. I met a few other gay people, and finally decided I had to tell my friends. I began with my best friend -- we worked at the same place, so I showed up just before he closed one night and dropped off a letter (it literally had, among other great lines, 'I'M GAY!' in about 72 point font). — Dave

The crucial moment in the above narrative is the moment when Dave “puts the ‘G’ word to his feelings,” a transition from the hysterical discourse to the master’s discourse. In this transition, the subject retroactively posits a master signifier to render his experiences coherently meaningful. The G-word functions as the signifier that stops the sliding of other signifiers in the subject’s universe and integrates the fragments of the subject’s experiences. Once this positing gesture is completed, the subject’s world becomes what it always has been. This is why in most of the coming out narratives that address pre-coming-out experiences the narrators never fail to mention that they always knew they were gay, some tracing their homosexual awakenings back to kindergarten year. This “always knowing what one is” is not to be taken literally; it ought to be understood as an effect of positing a master signifier. In the following quote, the narrator explicitly distinguishes her sexual awakening from her homosexual awareness, which occurs after her first lesbian encounter.

I am 18, and as I grasp this issue of homosexuality, I realize that it is something I always knew, sort of a silent understanding with myself, but life went on, and growing up I never made it a big issue. I felt different from a very early age, but than again, I never knew what it was like to be very normal anyway, so I figure that I didn't miss much. ..... I had already had my slew of boyfriends... always looking for something that I suppose would never be there. Then I had my first lesbian experience, and I finally admitted to myself that I was gay. — Abbie

In Abbie’s world, there has not been much turmoil in her early sexual life, at least not in her story. However, she feels different and looks for something that is never there until her first lesbian experience. Once she admits to herself that she is gay, all the past hazy experiences, her indifference to her slew of boyfriends, and the lack or void she has felt in her relationships all of sudden achieves meaning. Again, the master signifier “gay” leads to her realization that she has always been gay. At the moments of coming out—whether it be coming out to oneself, or coming out to family, friends, relatives, and co-workers the superimposition of a gay/lesbian/queer identity functions as a point of transsubstantiation that constitutes a new world of substances.
Coming out as a political act

Three moments of the homosexual subject are identified in the above analysis of coming out narratives: the initial splitting between the subject and the object, the hysteric’s discourse that questions the master qua symbolic order, and the submission to a “new” master registered in a master’s discourse. While the first moment is essential to the origin of any subjectivity, it is a conscious choice for the subject to remain in a perpetual position to interrogate the master or to recognize oneself in a new symbolic order. Regarding the master’s discourse, there is yet another option as to which master to choose. At each moment, the possibility of political-ethical actions is opened. The political choices implied in social constructionism and queer theory can be located in such a framework of subjectivity.

Social constructionism opts for the last moment—the moment of identification with the emerging gay/lesbian discourses that strive for justice, equality, and tolerance, and hence asserts the coming out act as a necessary political step that transcends the closet (Seidman, 2002). What the social constructionist fails to recognize is precisely the inefficacy of the approach in changing the fundamental symbolic coordinates of the social universe that organize our public and private lives, our realities and fantasies. If homosexuality has always been the disavowed underside of the heterosexual-heterosexist social order, it functions in the fantasmic domain. In other words, precisely because heterosexuals also fantasize homosexual scenarios, such fantasies have to be denied and rejected as those of the other. For instance, the most vivid picturesque scenes imagined about gay men being pedophiles luring our innocent children into the most despicable sexual acts are provided by those religious leaders and politicians who express the strongest outrage about the moral decadence of our times. It is in this sense that the visibility of the gay/lesbian communities created through coming out acts appears to be just a new form of closet, though a visible one. No wonder such visible closets are only possible within the frame of multiculturalist tolerance: what is to be tolerated, from the heterosexual and heterosexist point of view, is precisely their perceived excessive jouissance (enjoyment) that has always served and continues to serve as the underside of the heterosexist order.

Queer theory, in its many versions, is fundamentally ambiguous with regard to politics. On one hand, queer theory’s insistence on keeping its master signifier “queer” empty—contingent and open, can be viewed as a discursive gesture of persevering in the Lacanian hysteric’s discourse: why am I what you say I am? Here the queer subject asserts that I am nothing and I am everything; I am the very Thing that questions any interpellations, and I am impenetrable because there is nothing to penetrate. It is in this sense that the queer gesture is ethical, free of any pathological concerns in the Kantian sense, a pure gesture of negation without weighing between means and ends. Its apparent political inefficacy precisely consists in its effectiveness in interrogating the fundamental coordinates of the dominant gender sexual regime. On the other hand, to sustain such a position, queer theory resorts to a theatrical participation in the patriarchal-heterosexist socio-symbolic order, highlighting the failure and contradictions inherent in its performativity, which is evidenced by the queer theorist’s fascination with drag performance (for instance,
Butler, 1993). The danger lies in the ambivalence of the discursive form: the agent may shift from the split subject to an embodiment of the object of desire for the heterosexual subject’s gaze, as Butler has already recognized in terms of a possible “reidealization of the hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms” (Butler, 1993, p. 125). This new discourse is what Lacan calls the analyst’s discourse as shown in the following figure.

\[ \frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1} \]

*Figure 4: Lacan’s analyst’s discourse*

It is Žižek who points out that “the mathem of the discourse of perversion is the same as that of the analyst’s discourse” (Žižek, 1998, p. 80). Lacan’s notion of perversion contains the pseudo mathematical formula of an inverted fantasy as shown in the upper level of Figure 4: \(a \rightarrow \$,\), in which the small object of \(a\), the object-cause of desire takes the agent’s position (upper left), and presents itself as the instrument of the other’s enjoyment. The thin line that distinguishes the discourse of perversion from the analyst’s discourse is the gesture of instrumentalization: while the pervert presents him/herself as the tool-object for other’s pleasure, the analyst stands for the very void of the object sustained by fantasy. The queer gesture, for instance drag show, is fundamentally ambiguous precisely because the drag queen occupies the discursive position of agent as pervert when he offers himself as an object of pleasure or analyst when he presents not what he fakes but his faking as such. Despite the queer theorist’s emphasis on her/his role as social analyst, as the stand-in for the gap within the illusory lure of the heterosexual object of desire, the position is nonetheless ambiguous: it entertains the very illusory object of enjoyment that it sets out to subvert.

It can be seen from the above discussion that queer theory entails two discursive gestures: the hysterical’s perpetual questioning and the analyst’s subversion. The first gesture, the rejection of any normalized social categories, is perceived as politically inefficacious since political ideological hegemony demands master signifiers that quill the otherwise fragmented fields of meaning-reality. At the same time, the second gesture, because of its ambiguity, easily functions as the obscene underside of the dominant heterosexist symbolic order. Even though queer theory can be perceived as politically ineffective and suffers from the risk of being instrumentalized as a support for the heterosexist order, in principle, it can still be viewed as an ethical act, a continual negation of normalization.

In light of the analysis in the previous sections, the queer gesture insists on the second moment of the coming out act and resists the temptation to take the last step, leaving the emergent symbolic space open and refusing to foreclose it with some other master signifiers. It is in this sense that the queer gesture renders the more or less established coming out act problematic. Although the coming out act is in reality effective politically as the act itself has become considerably pragmatic in its calculation of whether, when, how, and to whom one comes out (Vargo, 1998), it nonetheless relies on clearly defined gay/lesbian identities, which the queer theorist views as always normalized, regulative, and suppressive. In her review of Jan
Clausen’s (“a long time lesbian, activist, and poet”) autobiography on her twice coming out—coming out as lesbian first and coming out as heterosexual woman later, Jolly (2001) perspicaciously points out that “Clausen’s autobiography dramatizes the structural contradictions in the coming out model of life story” (p. 479). Citing Fuss (1991) Jolly further states that a tension inheres in the inside-outside model of gay and lesbian identity “between that which is always there (but has been buried under layers of cultural suppression) and that which has never been socially permitted (but remains to be formed, created, or achieved)” (Jolly, 1991, p. 479). This seems to be the very point at which the limit of the coming out model as politics is reached. If Clausen’s autobiography addresses the issue of discipline within the gay/lesbian communities, which have become more or less suppressive, a brief examination of the relations between the heterosexual-heterosexist and the gay/lesbian universes will surely shed more light on the limitation of the constructionist approach.

Of the many species we know now of the genus of human sexuality—heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and so on, heterosexuality as a species had always functioned as the stand-in for the genus while other forms of sexuality, homosexuality in particular, had been viewed as perverted sexualities. Once a normalized symbolic order of homosexuality and the community that sustains it have emerged as competitor (since 1980’s), changes have taken place not in the relative positions of heterosexuality and other forms of sexuality, but precisely in the notion of sexuality itself. Heterosexuality has been withdrawn from the very notion of sexuality into a less visible territory of sex and sex behavior. Therefore, issues of sexuality or sexual orientation, whether they are political, social, or academic, are always issues of homosexuality or homosexual orientation. In our times, homosexuality as a species of human sexuality has started to occupy the position of the genus of sexuality and consequently, heterosexuality is, if still sexuality, not a sexual orientation. Now heterosexuality serves as the background of normalcy against which other forms of sexuality are foregrounded as sexuality. The causes of such change cannot be found within the multicultural social constructionist gay/lesbian movements alone; instead they have to be located in the domains where the contemporary capitalist system expands, incorporates, and defines the dimensions and coordinates of identity politics. This is probably why the queer theorist in the 21st century still feels the need to reiterate their fundamental political position to “reject a ‘minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal’” (Eng et al., 2005 p. 3, quoting Warner, 1993).

**Conclusion**

In this paper I first discussed three moments inherent to the coming out narratives in terms of Lacan’s notion of the subject and four discursive forms. It is shown that two such moments, manifested as two forms of discourse—the hysterics discourse and the master’s discourse, open the possibility of political actions. Within such a framework I then examined the political gestures entailed by the social constructionism and queer theory concerning the coming out processes: the social constructionist’s insistence on completing the master’s discourse and the queer gesture of rejecting any master. At this point, I would like to further state that
precisely because of the constructionist’s strategy of identification and her/his dependency on establishing and established identities, her/his political actions have taken place within the frame of the globalized capitalist system whose fundamental social coordinates remain unchallenged. In other words, the void as the possibility of universal opened at the moment of the hysteric’s discourse ends up in particular identities, which forecloses possible forms of politics anchored on universal struggles. The queer theorist, although her/his political approaches are often criticized for being ineffective, has nonetheless kept the political future open, insisting on the possible universal. It should be recognized, however, that the politics implied by queer theory is at least effective in one respect: its way of subverting the excessive and transgressive masculinity that functions as the disciplinary underside of the normative heterosexual order. Instead of confronting head to head the often violent reincarnation of the fantasmic object of masculinity, the queer gesture of mocking and faking it directly disturbs the fantasy.

Maybe Lacan’s thesis that there is no sexual relationship (rapport) could shed some light here. What Lacan means is that sex does not form social bonds (Libbrecht, 2001). On the contrary, the social symbolic makes sexual relationship possible and thus there is no sexual relationship as such. It is in this sense that communities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientations are founded on a certain fetishized object often claimed as the authentic core of one’s being. What is lost in such segmented identity communities grounded on their “constructed” particularities is precisely the dimension of the universal, forms of politics that have started to fade out of our horizon. Instead of remaining attached to the fundamental fantasy of the lost object of jouissance and the possibility of retrieving it (in the name of liberation, for instance), the real liberation may lie elsewhere, in a new form of intersubjectivity free from fetishistic illusions.

References


Notes

1 This collection of coming out narratives are available on the Internet at: http://www.rslevinson.com/gaylesissues/comingoutstories/blcoming.htm
It should be restated here that no systematic narrative analysis is intended to address the entirety of the corpus. Instead, passages are quoted to illustrate the moments in the rise of the homosexual subject.

2 The importance of Greimas’ model for this paper lies in the fact that this model centers on the quest axis along which a subject seeks for an object. In light of the Lacanian framework, one reasonable question we may address to Greimas is, “What if the object in the model does not exist out there.” The Lacanian answer is, of course, there is a split.

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Young Men, Religion and Attitudes Towards Homosexuality

Yasemin Besen and Gilbert Zicklin

This paper explains attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and explores the complex relationship of religiosity, youth, masculinity and support for gay rights. Based on a large, reliable and nationally representative study (n=1405) from PEW Center carried out in 2006, we estimate three logistic regression models predicting approval for gay marriage, gay adoption and gays in the military, which helps us to observe the differences. We conclude that while religiosity and fundamentalism negatively affect support for all three issues, the relationship varies by age and gender. Generally, young men do not show differences in their views of gay marriage, but men, especially religious, young men do show more negative attitudes than their female counterparts in support for gay adoption. Finally, men show more positive attitudes towards gays in the military.

Attitudes toward gays and lesbians are an important topic for social scientists, politicians and policy makers. Many recent studies have documented the increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States (Greenberg and Bystryn, 1982; Loftus, 2001; Werum and Winders, 2001). While many organizations have become more accepting and supportive of gay rights, religions and religious institutions have in general been unsupportive. Young people have therefore come of age caught between increasing support for and acceptance of gays from secular authorities and a strong counter-mobilization from the religious right. Young men in particular constitute an interesting research area, as they show less acceptance and tolerance towards gays than their female counterparts, despite the fact that young people on the whole are more tolerant than the rest of the population. Young men, therefore, seem to be situated at the intersection of two forces: one making them more tolerant, the other less. This paper focuses on young men and explores the effects of age, gender and particularly religiosity on their attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. We investigate the complex relationship of religiosity, masculinity and gay rights and unravel the effects of these seemingly contrasting influences.
Prior research

Prior research consistently shows that attitudes towards gay men and women have generally tended to be negative (Louderback and Whitley Jr., 1997). This anti-gay prejudice has been distinct and well documented in research done with convenience samples from college students (Herek, 1984, 1986; Kite, 1994) as well as large scale, representative surveys (Herek 1991; Herek and Capitaniao, 1996; Herek and Glunt, 1993). Overall, attitudes towards gay men and lesbians seem to be improving consistently over time as Americans become increasingly liberal in their opinions about civil liberties (Brooks, 2000). They have gained social acceptance from some parts of the U.S. population, but face opposition from others (Loftus, 2001; Werum and Winders 2001).

Attitudes towards gay men and lesbians have been explained by numerous factors. Individuals holding negative attitudes towards gay men and women tend to be more authoritarian, less educated, more traditional in sex roles and show negative attitudes towards minority groups (Herek, 1984 and 1991).

Men

One of the most central factors in attitudes towards homosexuality is the sex of the respondent. Many studies show that men on average have more negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians than women (Glenn and Weaver, 1979; Lottes and Kuriloff, 1992; Herek and Glunt, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Louderback and Whitley, 1997; Marsiglio, 1993; Kerns and Fine, 1994; Kite and Whitley, 1996; LaMar and Kite, 1998; Aberson, Swan and Emerson, 1999; Cotten-Huston and Waite, 2000; Wills and Crawford, 2000; Brown and Amoroso, 1975; Kite and Whitley, 1996; Glassner and Owen, 1976; Gurwitz and Marcus, 1978; Hansen, 1982; Kite, 1984; Laner and Laner, 1979; Millham et al., 1976; Minningerode, 1976; Steffensmeier and Steffensmeier, 1974; Storms, 1978; Weiss and Dein, 1979). However, even though this sex difference is well documented, few attempts have been made to explain it (Herek, 1988).

Further inquiries also show that attitudes towards gay men and women differ based on the sex of the target in interaction with the respondent’s sex (Kite and Whitney, 1996). Mary Kite and Bernard Whitley (1996) show that men are more negative towards gay men than women are while there are no differences between men and women in their attitudes towards lesbian women.

Kite and Whitney (1996) explain this difference based on gender belief systems. Gender belief systems define appropriate behaviors for men and women: people use these gender stereotypes to define what is feminine and masculine, and form opinions about others depending on how well they conform to them. They suggest that attitudes towards homosexuals are shaped by these existing gender belief systems. Because society has more strict expectations of masculinity than femininity (Herek, 1986; Hort, Fagot and Leinbach, 1990), men who display feminine traits receive more negative reaction than women who display masculine traits. We would therefore expect that gay men who violate male gender stereotypes to receive more negative reaction than gay women who violate female gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the more one is invested in the gender belief system, the more one is likely to have a negative view of gays and lesbians because they deviate from the gender norm, possibly forcing one to question the system itself. An additional explanation could be found in men’s traditional definitions of masculinity.
To the extent that gay men differ from heterosexual men’s definitions of traditional, normative masculinities, heterosexual men’s masculine identities might be threatened (Epstein, 1995, 1998; Herek and Capitano, 1999), leading to more negative feelings towards gay men.

Support for this view of masculinity threat leading to more negative views of gay men can be found in the differential views of men and women towards both gay men and women. In addition to the main effect of sex on attitudes towards homosexuality, where men have more negative attitudes on average towards gays than women do, there is also an indirect effect of sex on attitudes towards homosexuality. While women show no difference in their attitudes towards gay men and women, men have more negative attitudes towards gay men that towards gay women. While gay men seem to threaten heterosexual male’s gender belief systems, lesbianism is seen as erotic and therefore unthreatening (Reiss, 1986; Louderback et al., 1997).

Religion
Religion is an important factor in the understanding of discrimination against gay men and lesbians (Mcfarland, 1989). First, religious orientation is identified as a factor leading to discrimination, not just against gay men and lesbians, but racial discrimination as well (Allport and Ross, 1967; Batson, 1971). In the now-classic Allport and Ross model (1967), religious orientation is classified as extrinsic, where the individual uses religion to gain “security, comfort, status or social support” (p. 441) or intrinsic, where the individual uses religion only for personal and individual reasons. Similarly, C. D. Batson’s (1971) three factor model classifies religious orientation as Religion as Means, where religion is a means to reach an end, Religion as End, where religion is as an end in itself and finally Religion as Quest, where religion is a way to reach truth. Extensive research shows extrinsic religion is positively related, intrinsic religion unrelated and quest religion negatively related with discrimination (Mcfarland, 1989). Most of this research focuses on racial discrimination, however. Some prior studies point to the effects of religious orientation on gender discrimination and discrimination towards gays and lesbians; unfortunately, there is little research focusing exclusively on attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Extant research points to higher discrimination against women and gays and lesbians in intrinsic religion (McClain, 1979; Mcfarland, 1989), suggesting that the relationship between religious categories and attitudes towards gays is similar to that of religious categories and attitudes towards blacks.

Recent studies that focus exclusively on gay and lesbian discrimination show that some religions are more conservative and less accepting of gays and lesbians than others. Jews, those with no religious affiliation, and inactive Christians have higher rates of gay and lesbian support than Catholics, who are, in turn, more tolerant than Protestants, who show the lowest levels of tolerance towards gays and lesbians (Irwin and Thompson, 1977; Glenn and Weaver, 1979; Henley and Pincus 1978; Lottes and Karloff, 1992; Wills and Crawford, 2000).

Religiosity
In addition to the overall effect of religious orientation, fundamentalism and being a born-again Christian are specifically identified as factors associated with negative
attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Herek, 1987). Within the large category of Protestants, fundamentalism – a belief in the literal truth of the Bible – is a particular factor related to attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Herek’s (1987) findings show that fundamentalism increased prejudice towards gays and lesbians. Other studies confirm the effects of fundamentalism on negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Wagenaar and Barton, 1977; Herek and Glunt, 1993; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Marsiglio, 1993; Cutton, Hudson and Waite, 2000). Unfortunately, since fundamentalism is not included as a control in other studies (i.e. McClain, 1979; Griffin et al., 1987), it is hard to predict the direct and indirect effects of religion and fundamentalism.

Finally, in addition to religion and fundamentalism, religiosity or attending services is identified as a distinct factor associated with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Many studies have found that the more individuals attend services, outside of weddings and funerals, the less tolerant they are of gays and lesbians (Beatty and Walker, 1984; Cochran and Beeghley, 1991, Herek and Glunt, 1993). Randy Fischer et al. (1994), however point out that, for individuals who belong to more progressive and accepting religions, attendance at services has no effect on attitudes towards homosexuality. It remains unclear if the effects are due to the reinforcement of an anti-gay message at less progressive churches, or due to a selection effect, with less tolerant individuals attending church more often.

**Political ideology**

Religiosity is also closely related to political ideology as both deal with the idea of morality. According to Paul Brewer (2003), public opinion on gays and lesbians is partially explained as an issue of equality (McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Wilcox and Wolpert, 1996 and 2000), partially linked to political party affiliation and political ideology (Haeberle, 1999; Lewis and Rogers, 1999; Wilcox and Norrander, 2002) and partially as a moral issue (Lewis and Rogers, 1999). Therefore, the political affiliation and views of individuals are an important factor in understanding their views on gay issues.

**Contact**

Furthermore, knowing someone who is gay tends to lead to more positive attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1988; Schneider and Lewis, 1984). Further and more recent studies confirm these findings (Ellis and Vasseur, 1993; Herek and Capitanio, 1996; LaMar and Kite, 1998; Cotten-Huston and Waite, 2000; Wills and Crawford, 2000). However, this interpretation has been criticized methodologically because just as having openly gay relatives and friends could make one more likely to have positive attitudes, the direction of causality could be in the other direction, so that it could be argued that people who support gay rights tend to associate with people who are openly gay.

Further research also points to other correlates such as income, education, geographic region and race and ethnicity (Herek, 1984; Schneider and Lewis, 1984), which are important control factors.
**Attitudes and policy areas**

In the literature, partly due to data restrictions, attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are generally measured as a unified category, mostly through a feeling thermometer as to how positive or negative one feels towards gay men and lesbians on a scale from 0-100. However, attitude towards gay men and lesbians is not a single unified category. While feeling thermometers are useful, it is important to see the inner differences within the overall attitude. Unpacking policy views in this way will give us crucial insight into the differences in opinion regarding different issues. Different factors may be associated with different concrete aspects of gay related issues: for instance, having gays in the military may be more of a threat to heterosexual men’s masculinity than allowing gays to adopt children. Therefore, we shall look at concrete, policy related issues such as gay marriage, gay adoption and gays in the military.

Furthermore, each of these issues is separate and divides survey respondents in distinct ways. Rather than grouping them all together, it is important to model approvals and factors explaining opinion in each category separately. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of attitudes towards gays and lesbians.

By exploring attitudes towards these issues, this paper focuses on the complex and interrelated relationship between gender, age and religion. The intersection of these areas creates a unique place for young men. While men are traditionally less supportive of gay rights, young people are more supportive. Young men, therefore, are at the center of two opposing social forces. How does belonging to two categories of contrasting views predominate young men’s attitudes towards gays and lesbians? Furthermore, religion and religiosity are central factors in explaining support for gay rights: we will pay special attention to the attitudes of young religious men and unravel the intertwined relationship of gender, age and religiosity in explaining attitudes towards gay men and lesbians.

**Methods**

Our data come from the Pew Center, which conducts regular national surveys that measure social and political attitudes, values and public attentiveness. Our data come from the recent March 2006 survey on attitudes towards homosexuality. This dataset provides extensive information on factors predicting attitudes towards gays and lesbians, ranging from demographic factors to attitudinal factors, providing the opportunity to estimate a comprehensive model in understanding opinions. It offers a very large, nationally representative sample (n=1405).

Our aim is to understand attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. As noted before, however, though these attitudes are multi-faceted, most datasets on the topic do not typically include many different variables. The dataset allows us to see differential opinions based on the issue, measured by three dependent variables: approval of gay marriage, approval of gay adoption and approval of openly gay people serving in the military. These three variables were recoded as dichotomous variables, coded 1 if the respondent approved and 0 otherwise.

Three separate models were estimated, predicting the above dependent variables. Since the dependent variables are dichotomous, logistic regression models were estimated. The independent variables included in the models were uniform to enable comparison. The first set of independent variables included in the model is
demographic variables. Sex of the respondent was recoded as a dummy variable where 1=Male and 0=Female. Age of the respondent was asked in years as a continuous variable. However, in addition to age as a continuous variable, a dummy variable for being 18-24 year-olds of age was included (labeled “youth” in the tables presenting the regression results). While the continuous age variable captures the gradual effect of age, the dummy variable should capture any threshold effect. Income, measured in dollars was included, as was race, recoded into a dummy variable as white=1 and non-white=0; Hispanic was coded as 1 if Hispanic and 0 otherwise. Finally, marital status and parenthood are important demographic factors, which could potentially affect attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, especially given their established relationship with authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996). Therefore, both these variables were recoded to test for the effects of being married, coded 1 if married and 0 otherwise and being a parent, coded 1 if parent and 0 otherwise. Finally, political affiliation was included as two separate dummy variables: Republican (coded 1 if Republican and 0 otherwise) and Democrat (coded 1 if Democrat and 0 otherwise), leaving political independents as the excluded category.

In addition to demographic factors which affect attitudes towards homosexuality, we have included a series of factors on religion, religiosity and being a born-again Christian. First, we have coded the religious affiliations of the respondents as dummy variables. In addition to the effects of religious affiliation, religiosity was measured through attending services aside from weddings and funerals, measured in number of times the respondent attends religious services on a weekly basis.

Finally, being a born-again Christian was included as a separate category, where the respondents who identified themselves as born-again Christians were coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. While being born-again is not exactly the same as fundamentalism, it is a closely related concept, and should be indicative of many of the same attitude structures.

We have also included attitudinal variables in predicting attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, such as attitudes towards abortion, coded as 1 if approve and 0 otherwise. This inclusion is not intended to imply that views on abortion lead to views on policies relating to homosexuals, but rather to control for general attitudes towards culture war issues (Lindaman and Haider-Markel, 2002). Controlling for these attitudes in such a way allows us to isolate the effects of the other variables specifically on gay rights issues, rather than on the broader category of cultural policy questions. Furthermore, we have included a measure of media exposure, predicting attitudes towards homosexuality such that respondents, who have access to media and are exposed to homosexuality would have more positive views, through access to the Internet coded 1 for access and 0 otherwise.

In addition to the direct effects of these variables, in explaining attitudes towards gay marriage, gay adoption and gays in the military, we have included a series of interaction effects to capture the interactive effects of these variables through gender. We hypothesize that being a male, particularly a young male, would affect how some of the above variables would affect attitudes towards homosexuality. For this purpose, we have included interaction effects of Male by
white, parent, married, born-again, Republican, Democrat, Internet Access, Abortion Attitudes, Religiosity and Age.

To explain attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, three logistic regression models were estimated, predicting attitudes towards gay marriage, gay adoption and gays in the military, all using the same independent variables to allow for easy comparison. To isolate the effects of being male and young instead of dividing the dataset and losing sample size, dummy variables were employed instead as well as interactions to capture both direct and indirect effects.

**Initial results**

First, we looked at the descriptive statistics on attitudes towards gay marriage, gay adoption and gays in the military. While these three aspects all constitute attitudes towards gay men and lesbians in our society, each issue differs in terms of approval rates. Table 1 shows attitudes toward each issue in percentages in the overall population and amongst 18-24 year-old men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall Population</th>
<th>Men 18-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gay Marriage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Favor</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Oppose</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gay Adoption</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Favor</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Oppose</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gay Military</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Favor</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Oppose</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Attitudes towards gay marriage, adoption and military for young men and the overall population (in percentages). Source: Pew Center, 2006

Among these three, allowing gays to serve openly in the military has the highest approval rate, at 64.4 percent of the overall population, with 20.7 percent strongly favoring. This is followed by gay adoption, with 46.8 percent (13.3 percent strongly favoring) of the overall population supporting policies that would allow gays to adopt children. This is followed closely by gay marriage, with 39.1 percent of the
overall population supporting gay marriage, though only about 10 percent strongly support it.

When we look specifically at young men between the ages 18-24 – the same group represented by the dummy variable in the logistic regression models – we see that young men have higher levels of support on all three issues. However, their ranking of support follows the same pattern as the overall population, even though their approval in every category is higher. The highest approval rate is for gays in the military, where 67.8 percent of young men support openly gay people serving in the military, almost half of those strongly supporting it. This is followed by gay adoption, where 51.7 percent of young men support gay adoption (19.6 percent of them strongly) and finally 43.5 percent of young men support gay marriage, while an almost equal number, 39.1 percent, strongly oppose it.

Compared to the overall population, young men between the ages 18-24 show higher support for three issues, but they follow general society’s rankings of these issues. As Figure 1 shows, young men also seem to cluster around more extreme categories: strongly agree, strongly disagree, rather than in the middle categories.

On all three issues, young men are more likely to “strongly support” gay-friendly policies. Also, the proportion of young men strongly opposing gay adoption and gays in the military are much lower than those in the overall population. The exception is in gay marriage, where the proportion strongly opposing is rather higher at 39.1 percent, opposed to 32.7 in the overall population.
Logistic regression results

While these descriptive statistics show us initial differences between young men and the overall population, a more accurate picture requires that we isolate the effects of sex and age. The first logistic regression model explains attitudes towards gay marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male x White</td>
<td>-0.295</td>
<td>0.771</td>
<td>-0.38262</td>
<td>0.702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Parent</td>
<td>1.002</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>1.664452</td>
<td>0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Born Again</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.576</td>
<td>1.151042</td>
<td>0.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Republican</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.971875</td>
<td>0.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Democrat</td>
<td>-0.471</td>
<td>0.607</td>
<td>-0.77595</td>
<td>0.438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Internet Use</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.67637</td>
<td>0.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Married</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.561</td>
<td>-0.03387</td>
<td>0.973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Abortion Views</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.543</td>
<td>0.502762</td>
<td>0.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Religiosity</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.43333</td>
<td>0.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Age</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-2.582</td>
<td>1.564</td>
<td>-1.6509</td>
<td>0.099</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.424</td>
<td>2.040094</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age x Church Attendance</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>-0.228</td>
<td>0.704</td>
<td>-0.32386</td>
<td>0.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>-1.705</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>-4.49868</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>-0.294</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>-0.70335</td>
<td>0.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>2.424837</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born Again</td>
<td>-0.918</td>
<td>0.413</td>
<td>-2.22276</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
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<td>0.472</td>
<td>-2.07415</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
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<td>0.425</td>
<td>-2.40471</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td>0.369</td>
<td>-0.53388</td>
<td>0.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>0.565</td>
<td>-0.58407</td>
<td>0.559</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>0.555</td>
<td>0.818018</td>
<td>0.414</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.056</td>
<td>2.053571</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>0.335</td>
<td>2.20597</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-1.86364</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>1.574</td>
<td>0.461245</td>
<td>0.645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Logistic regression estimates predicting attitudes towards gay marriage. Shaded coefficients significant at α=0.05

Interestingly, there is no independent effect of sex on attitudes towards gay marriage, meaning that, on the whole, men are not less likely than women to approve of gay marriage. Also, there is no threshold effect of age, meaning that the effect of age on approval is relatively linear, and that 18 to 24 year-olds are not different as a group than members of other age groups. The linear effect of age can be seen in the age variable, which shows that the older people are, the less likely
they are to approve of gay marriage. So, while age is a marginally significant predictor, young men do not show differential approval rates.

Overall, approval of gay marriage is predicted by a combination of demographic, attitudinal and religious variables. Higher income, being a Democrat, being Roman Catholic and favoring abortion increases the likelihood of approving of gay marriage. Being religious, identifying oneself as a born again Christian, being a Republican and being a parent decreases the likelihood of approving gay marriage.

While men and women show no differences in their attitudes towards gay marriage, the one marginally significant interaction effect is between being male and being a parent. While being a parent makes one less likely to approve of gay marriage, this is not the case for men who are parents: they are more likely to approve of gay marriage.

So, overall, when we look specifically at gay marriage and model its approval, we see that young people are more supportive, yet being a male has no significant direct effect.

Our second model looks at approval of gay adoption. While age was a significant factor in explaining gay marriage – younger people were more likely to approve – age does not seem to be a factor in approval for gay adoption, either as a continuous or threshold effect. Sex also has no direct effect: men and women on average do not seem significantly different in their attitudes towards gay adoption. Therefore, solely being a young male does not seem to lead to differences in approval of gay adoption.

The direct significant effects seem comparable to attitudes towards gay marriage. The significant predictors of approval of gay marriage are religiosity, where the more often the respondent attends services, the less likely he or she is to approve of gay marriage, being married, where being married makes the respondent less likely to approve of gay adoption, being a Republican, which makes one less likely to approve of gay adoption, being a born-again Christian, which makes one less likely to approve of gay adoption, being Roman Catholic, which makes one more likely to approve and approving of abortion, which makes one more likely to approve of gay adoption. This final result indicates that as with approval of gay marriage, being more liberal on other culture war issues makes it more likely that the respondent will be more liberal with regard to gay adoption. A new significant predictor is Internet access, which makes people more likely to approve of gay adoption. This might be because the Internet provides more exposure and provides more information, leading to more positive attitudes toward gay adoption. However, it could also be interpreted as a self-selection bias, where younger and more liberal people, in ways not captured by other variables, tend to have Internet access.

While being male has no direct effects on approval of gay adoption, there are many significant and interesting interaction effects. Overall, the less frequently a respondent attends religious services, the more likely he or she is to approve of gay adoption. However, men who attend services are less likely than women who attend religious services to approve of gay adoption.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male x White</td>
<td>-0.938</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>-1.98729</td>
<td>0.047</td>
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<td>Male x Parent</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.309896</td>
<td>0.757</td>
</tr>
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<td>Male x Born Again</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>0.583333</td>
<td>0.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male x Republican</td>
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<td>0.401</td>
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Table 3: Logistic regression estimates predicting attitudes towards gay adoption. Shaded coefficients significant at α=0.05

Also, among married people – even though being married makes one less likely to approve of gay adoption – married men, compared to married women, are more likely to approve. Finally, white men are less likely than white women to approve of gay adoption.

Our final model deals with attitudes towards gays in the military. Here, we see a completely different picture. While being male had no significant effects on the gay marriage and gay adoption, it is a significant predictor of approval of gays in the military, where men are more likely to approve of allowing gays to serve openly in the military. Age, however has no significant effect: there is no difference between older and younger people in their attitudes towards gays in the military.
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Table 4: Logistic regression estimates predicting attitudes towards gays in the military. Shaded coefficients significant at $\alpha=0.05$

Religiosity is a significant predictor of approval of gays in the military. Interestingly, we also detect a significant interaction effect of religiosity and being male. Being a religious man, compared to a religious woman, makes one less likely to approve of gays in the military. Similarly, male parents are less approving of gays in the military than their female counterparts.

Discussion

This analysis yields a complex mapping of relationship between young men’s attitudes towards different gay rights issues and their religiosity. In all three issues, we see religiosity and being born-again as leading to disapproval. Parallel with the argument made by Glock and Stark (1966), our results show that more religious and
fundamentalist people display a more “closed-minded, ethnocentric mindset, which is shown here as a general tendency to discriminate” (McFarland, 1989, p. 333).

However, men do not have less support for all three issues. When we separate the issues, for gay marriage, gender has no effect: therefore men and women are not different in their attitudes on at least one of the issues. This might also be because of the lack of a linear relationship: it is possible that some men approve and some disapprove, resulting in a curvilinear relationship between gender and support for gay marriage, which requires further research. Age, however, is not as important as we predicted. While it has a marginally positive effect on approval of gay marriage, it does not affect men differently than women.

When it comes to gay adoption, there is no direct effect of being a man, but there are interaction effects, where religious men are less supportive than religious women and white men are less supportive than white females of gay adoption. However, married men are more supportive than married women. Therefore, in attitudes towards gay adoption, gender is a complex issue. In both issues, however, age does not seem to be important: younger and older men do not seem significantly different.

Gays in the military is a very different issue than the previous ones, for men. This is the only issue in which being a man leads to more support of gays rights. While men who are religious are less supportive of gays in the military than religious females, the direct effects of gender are in the opposite direction. Such a finding shows that for men, attitudes towards homosexuality are not a unified category, but one that is separated by issues.

**Conclusion and future direction limitations**

This paper has looked at the attitudes towards homosexuality in the United States and shows they do not consist of one issue, but rather have inner differences based on the issue, which result in different attitudes. Traditional studies have agreed upon the effects of gender, age and religiosity on attitudes towards homosexuality. But rather than simply looking at “attitudes towards homosexuality” as a large, reified category, this paper looks at three main issues: attitudes towards gay marriage, adoption, and gays in the military. Furthermore, rather than making assumptions about young men, this paper looks at young men’s attitudes in-depth and provides a more nuanced understanding. Attitudes towards gay marriage and adoption are not different for men, though men are more likely to support allowing gays to serve openly in the military.

What is also interesting is to see the interaction effects of men and religiosity: where religious men, rather than religious women, are less likely to support gay adoption and allowing gays in the military. Overall, rather than looking at simplistic relationships between men and attitudes towards homosexuality, we have tried to demonstrate the complexity of the relationship, and the next step would be to unravel why men see these issues so differently through in-depth interviews.
References


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This book raises important questions about how to renew links between researchers and activists in the area of men’s studies. In *Young Men and Masculinities*, the prolific Seidler revisits some familiar territory from his previous work, but focuses on the issue of young men and masculinities as a possible means to bridge the gap that has opened up between the political and therapeutic points of view within the profeminist men’s movement. Building on some of the ideas laid out in earlier works such as *Transforming Masculinities* (2006) and *Unreasonable Men* (1994), Seidler uses *Young Men and Masculinities* to bring theories of masculinities – particularly the work of R. W. Connell – to task for discounting the emotional and sexual experiences of men, and young men in particular. Though at times this volume is provocative without necessarily being prescriptive, it represents an important step toward reassessing the severed connections between researchers and activists.

The book contains fifteen chapters that range widely over a variety of topics. One recurring theme is Seidler’s pointed critique of Connell’s work. In particular, Seidler takes exception to Connell’s model of hegemonic masculinities, which focuses on patriarchy and power relations to the exclusion of personal feelings: “The distinction Connell draws between, on the one hand, emotional life as ‘therapeutic’ and, on the other, ‘politics’ conceived exclusively in structural terms works readily to disdain the voices of men he would otherwise want to listen to” (p. 13). According to Seidler, this focus on the structure of patriarchy leads Connell to discount the notion that patriarchy also constrains the emotional lives of men. The resulting rejection of young men’s inner pain leaves no room for activists or researchers to connect with their emotional and sexual lives.

According to Seidler, part of the problem for scholars working with young men is that these researchers unwittingly rely on rationalist assumptions implicit in the Enlightenment tradition that informs the social sciences. Consequently, researchers make a positivist assumption that adulthood is good, while “adolescence” is bad. Seidler elaborates, “As adults we can assume that ‘adolescence’ is a problem that needs to be solved” (p. 110). This tendency can be particularly problematic when trying to address an issue such as young men who engage in risky behavior. Traditional methodologies in the social sciences encode masculine assumptions, thus turning young men into objects of study and stifling their subjectivity. Seidler argues that researchers must take the emotional lives of young men seriously. This deceptively simple observation can lead to quite challenging and potentially messy reevaluations, such as this observation from a discussion of domestic violence during pregnancies: “There is a danger of creating a fixed category of ‘abusing men,’ rather than learning how pregnancy invokes unresolved emotional feelings in men” (p. 172).
Seidler asserts that another problem with Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinities is that it is too universalist, assuming that the structure of patriarchy looks the same everywhere. Seidler offers loosely comparative observations about masculinities in different parts of the world in order to complicate Connell’s model. The best example is a discussion of the continued influence of religion on self-identified secular societies, specifically contrasting the impact of Catholicism in Latin America with the effect of Protestantism in Northern Europe and the United States. In Latin America (particularly Mexico), Catholicism has contributed to a significant separation between the public and private spheres. Therefore, Latin cultures place greater emphasis on public behavior and the appearance of behaving correctly toward others. Seidler concludes, “This might make it easier, for instance, for men to have affairs as long as they do not draw it to the attention of their partners” (p. 37). On the other hand, Protestant cultures place more emphasis on maintaining consistency between the public and private spheres, along with taking greater responsibility for personal actions.

Another intriguing theme in the book is Seidler’s argument that globalization has created a tectonic generational shift, accelerated by the Internet and new technologies, which has reordered gender relations for young people across social classes in a variety of global cultures. Young men can use the Internet as a space to explore feelings they might otherwise feel uncomfortable discussing. These feelings could relate to their sexuality, or gender identity. Generational differences result from developments in the “real” world, too. The greater gender equality that has developed in the United States and Northern Europe has changed the way some young men feel about themselves and their partners, particularly in relation to parenting. Whereas an earlier generation of men attempted to remain emotionally aloof from their families, a younger generation of men feels differently. If younger men grew up in a setting with larger gender equality, they may wish to share more of their inner experiences with their families. Indeed, Seidler makes the point explicitly toward the end of the book that activists can sometimes have an easier time reaching young men as they prepare for fatherhood (p. 196).

In all, this volume is sure to provoke lively debates between academics and activists. By challenging some of the theoretical underpinnings of many researchers involved in the field of masculinities studies, Seidler raises important questions about their work. Seidler’s objective is not merely to incite, however, but to renew the link between researchers and activists.

References

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Andrew Singleton

The idea that there is a “crisis” among western male youth has been widely championed by policy makers, politicians, parenting experts, self-help authors, and psychologists for more than a decade. Male youth, it is typically claimed, are failing to manage the challenges and complexities of contemporary life with the same assurance, skill and confidence as young women. Claims about the youthful male “crisis” are usually substantiated by evidence showing that males, compared to females, have higher levels of suicide, are more likely to die in an accident, more likely to be victims of assault, and record poorer academic outcomes. Despite the almost ceaseless public pronouncements about the magnitude of this crisis, many scholars remain skeptical about whether it is appropriate, or even accurate, to describe young men’s lives in this way. Some argue that the evidence put forward to justify the “crisis” idea usually involves a comparison of male and female life outcomes without factoring in things like class and race. Other critics observe that the question of enduring male power is rarely broached in pronouncements of male “disadvantage.” Nonetheless, this idea that male youth are in crisis has proved remarkably enduring.

Gary Barker’s new book, *Dying to be Men*, could be taken as evidence that the alleged malaise gripping male youth in the west is typical of boys worldwide, particularly in countries characterized by acute disadvantage. In its pages, Barker documents the violence, hopelessness and marginalization experienced by male youth in the Caribbean, Nigeria and Brazil, painting a picture of lives that are relentlessly bleak. And yet, Barker himself never resorts to facile descriptions of “crisis” when presenting his material. Instead, *Dying to be Men* stands as a balanced, sensitive, and insightful account of male youth on the margins in an increasingly globalized world. If it finds the readership it deserves, it has the potential to redefine debates about the trajectory of young men’s lives worldwide.

Barker is uniquely placed to write a book of this kind: already an internationally recognized scholar, he is also a practitioner. He currently works for a non-government organization in Brazil, having previously worked in other developing nations and in the United States. He draws on his own personal observations, along with extensive focus group and interview data from all of these settings, in order to describe what life is like for young men in places such as these. The author’s intimate and authentic knowledge of his subject matter is one of the many highlights of this compelling and important book.

*Dying to be Men* provides insights into the lives of those male youth living in some of the toughest areas of Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, the Caribbean and Nigeria. The focus in each of the chapters is thematic rather than geographic: chapters
variously deal with social exclusion, violence, gang membership, employment, fatherhood, education or sex, be that in Brazil or Lagos. With each of these topics, Barker’s approach is similar: outline the problem, explain why young men are acting and behaving in certain ways, then present data from various locations. This approach works extremely well, and the reader is able to form a cross-national perspective about the issues which confront young men. Particularly successful are the chapters on sex, employment, and gang involvement.

While the book is very readable, several aspects of Barker’s work are worthy of specific mention. First is his lucid theoretical explanation of various issues. Notable examples of this include the sections “Framing a way of understanding young men” in chapter 2, and “Young men and violence” in chapter 5. Barker is readily able to sum up complex social and psychological theories and offer the reader a clear way of understanding the various issues which beset certain young men, especially those who are socially disenfranchised. Second is Barker’s extremely balanced view of both gender relations and the trajectory of men’s lives. Dying to be Men is no incendiary polemic about the ails of contemporary masculine youth. Instead, Barker constantly reminds the reader about the difficulties which beset young women in the various settings described in this book, while also noting that not all young men have a propensity for violence, delinquency or misogyny. This balanced approach means that Barker’s conclusions can always be understood in broader context. Thirdly, mention must be made of the interview data Barker draws on throughout the book. These first-person accounts from a diverse group of young men offer a rich understanding of the issues, difficulties, and triumphs of their lives, all of which makes Barker’s arguments persuasive.

Dying to be Men is a worthy addition to the empirically grounded literature about male youth. Written with great insight and humanity, it is essential reading for policy makers, scholars and practitioners alike.

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