

Introduction

In 2005, I was invited to speak to several dozen radio sports personalities and shock jocks about my book, *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*. One morning I was talking to Deter, an on-air radio personality from a city far from the liberal comfort of Los Angeles or London, where I split my time. Deter looks like a typical sports fan. His attire is sloppy, and other than an emerging belly, he looks like he once ran track, or maybe hit a ball of some sorts. Deter tells me that he is intrigued with my research on the changing nature of heterosexual masculinities and the decreased gay-male phobia I find in competitive team sport environments. Like every sportscaster on whose show I appear, he is clear to preface that he has no problems with gay men, or gay athletes by extension (cf. Nylund 2007). But of the dozens of sportscasters who interviewed me about my research during that autumn, Deter stands out because he tells me that he has several gay friends. He even tells me that he is a staunch supporter of gay rights. After a few minutes of off-air conversation however, Deter says, “My on-air personality is quite different.” Deter informs me that he is known for his brash, brazen and (much to my surprise) homophobic on-air sentiment. “It’s an act,” he says. And, just a minute before we go on air, he asks if I’m willing to “roll with it.”

Deter’s transformation from gay rights supporter to raging on-air homophobe is reminiscent of many of the attitudes expressed by high school and university heterosexual team sport athletes I interviewed between 1999 and 2004. When speaking privately, very few said that they were homophobic, yet all assumed that their teammates were. Not wanting to be out of step with other men, most athletes told me that they too used homophobic language. Although they did not explain it this way, they maintained that using homophobic discourse was a method of retaining their heteromale capital among their teammates. However, they insisted that their homophobic discourse was not meant to express personal homophobia. Instead, these men argued that it was designed to say, “I am not gay” and “I am not weak” to their friends and teammates. Thus, rather than homophobia being reproduced through personal prejudice, for both Deter and these other men, it served as a form of heterosexual and male social currency.

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I am not excusing their discourse. Certainly it shapes frameworks of stigma around homosexuality. Also, while most of the openly gay athletes I interviewed said that their teammates' usage of terms like 'poof' and 'fag' did not bother them, many said that when they were closeted such language made it difficult for them to assess the level of homophobia among their teammates. Accordingly, I do not support using homophobic language in this or almost any other way. However, as part of the process of learning to see the social world through informant's perspectives, it is important to understand intent. In this case, homophobic discourse permitted these men to prove to each other that they were both masculine and (more important) that they were not gay. Interestingly, I found many openly gay men saying, "That's gay," too. It was for this reason that I subtitled the book, *and the cult of masculinity*. Men, it seemed, were more interested in keeping up masculine appearances, than standing up for what they believed.

As vexing as it was to hear members of a team individually pledge support for gays, but collectively suggest they were not ready for openly gay athletes, this was still considerable progress compared to the way sport scholars defined the relationship between homosexuality and sport during the 1980s and earlier part of the 1990s. Michael Messner (1992: 34) influentially described the degree of homophobia in the sports world as 'staggering.' For example, Messner's interviews with heterosexual men clearly indicates that during the 1980s and early 1990s there was no place for a 'fag' in sport. This was something I experienced, personally.

At 25 years of age, I broke the guiding principle of masculinity: I came out as gay. More so, I came out of the closet as an openly gay distance running coach at a conservative high school, in a conservative county. Here, I experienced just how much privilege heterosexuals have, not only in sport, but also in the dominant culture. Whereas before I was a privileged white, middle-class, athletic, young, ostensibly 'heterosexual' male, after coming out, things radically changed. My public identity transformed from 'the outstanding coach' to 'the faggot coach,' and the school letters that adorned my proud athletes' varsity jackets quickly lost their symbolic representation of a nationally revered distance running squad, instead gaining social stigma. Accordingly, my heterosexual athletes and I began to face the discrimination that accompanied the stigma of the time. Athletes ceased to join my team and those remaining found themselves immersed in daily battles with ignorance and violence.

My status as the first publicly recognized gay male coach in the United States went relatively unnoticed until a football player brutally assaulted one of my heterosexual athletes in 1995, believing him (through a guilt by association process) to be gay. Although the vicious attack was witnessed by other football players, none bothered to intervene. It seems they enjoyed watching a 'faggot' get his ass kicked. Without intervention, the 250-pound football player knocked my 150-pound runner to the ground, sat atop him,

and pummeled his face. While gouging at his eyes, a woman emerged from her home and pleaded for the assailant to stop. “Stop it! Stop it!” she yelled. “You’re going to kill him.” The assailant responded, “It aint over until the faggot’s dead.” This is all that my athlete heard.

Knowing his life depended on it, my runner somehow squirmed from beneath the legs of his assailant. He rose to his feet, and although his vision was obscured with blood, he managed to sprint away and scale a fence, one the football player was too heavy to get over. My athlete was left with four broken facial bones, two permanent screws in his pallet, and a copy of a police report that described the incident as ‘mutual combat.’ This, according to the police, was *not* a hate crime. It was not an assault, or a crime in any way.

I was not a sociologist when I first wrote of these experiences in my autobiography *Trailblazing: The True Story of America’s First Openly Gay High School Coach*. Nor had I read the works of Michael Messner, Brian Pronger, Michael Kimmel or Donald Sabo, but I realized that the beating was influenced by a number of events, institutions, as well as his football team’s culture. I knew the football player was taught to hate. Although I could not articulate it this way at the time, I knew that the assailant played within a hyper-masculine arena, in which homophobic discourse marked certain types of people as sacred and others as profane (cf. Durkheim 1976). What was clear to me was that the assailant’s aggression was influenced by indoctrination into an extreme form of masculinity predicated on homophobic hate. He was rewarded by his teammates, and encouraged into homophobia by his coach. Indeed, after the beating, the football player earned hero status among his teammates.

Today, I understand that this abusive football player, his teammates and coach, were not entirely to blame. Rather we, a sports obsessed, homophobic and hyper-masculine culture, created him. His Christian-conservative, American upbringing influenced him into a violent, masculine ethos with the promise of masculine glory and praise should he succeed. In football, he was taught that the most important principle was an othering of a largely invisible group of demonized men—‘faggots.’ Should we then be surprised that this 16-year-old boy would take the opportunity to show that he received the message well? When faced with an actual homosexual, or the sympathizer of a homosexual, not beating him would be to violate his sanctified beliefs. Had he *not* assaulted this ‘homosexual,’ he would have failed his teammates, and failed as a man.

As much as I still hate this player today (I am not good enough to forgive), I understand that his homophobic violence was a logical consequence of the position he found himself in. It was because of the valorization of heteromascularity and its associated violence that I returned to graduate school in 1998. I desired to know the cultural mechanisms that influenced a young boy to hate, and I desired to better understand the relationship between gay athletes, sport and compulsory heterosexuality.

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Under the supervision of Francesca Cancian, Michael Messner and Brian Pronger, and with the support of Michael Kimmel, Don Sabo and Judy Treas, I began to better understand the intersection of masculinity, sport and homophobia. As a sociologist of some years now, I better understand the operation of hegemony, and the near-seamless manner in which groups of people can maintain power by policing ideologies both through the threat of force, and the willing compliance of those oppressed. I now work with the complex role that sports play in society, particularly in producing a violent, homophobic masculinity. I have a better understanding of how the very structure of team sports influence boys and men to develop a narrow sense of heteromascularity, and I understand sport's influence in teaching boys to accept risk, to out-group others, and to use violence in order to raise their capital among other men. However, I now also realize that matters are beginning to change.

In 1999, I began collecting in-depth interviews of openly gay high school and university athletes. Much to my surprise, I found openly gay athletes playing, surviving, and sometimes thriving on their teams. Although most of these athletes swam in a sea of heterosexism (and often contributed to it themselves), all played in absence of overt homophobic violence and marginalization. None were called faggots directly (at least not with intent to wound), and none experienced the violence that my athletes and I endured. These almost exclusively white, openly gay men from various locations, sports and levels, challenged the hegemonic form of masculinity. In other words, on-air personalities like Deter are beginning to represent an archaic archetype of masculinity. In light of this, I wrote:

If the softening of masculinity continues, the older conservative form of masculinity may be less alluring, and the masculinizing context of sport may have to adjust to the new version of masculinity or risk losing its effect on socializing boys and men in the culture as a whole. In other words, if everything changes around sport, sport will either have to change or it will lose its social significance and be viewed as a vestige of an archaic model of masculinity. (Anderson 2005a: p. 16)

In the years preceding my research on gay athletes, my research agenda included multiple ethnographies about the experiences of straight men in sports, too. In my studies of white, university rugby, cheerleaders and soccer players, as well as the members of a racially mixed university fraternity, I show that university-attending men are rapidly running from the hegemonic type of masculinity that scholars have been describing for the past 25 years.

Heterosexual men in these studies no longer physically assault their gay teammates, and heterosexual men increasingly refuse to symbolically wound gay men with homonegative discourse (cf. McCormack and Anderson forthcoming). Instead, perhaps influenced by the decreasing rates of

cultural homophobia of the broader society, many of these men are politically charged to change the landscape of masculinity. Others simply adopt an inclusive approach to masculinity because it is what their teammates are doing.

I am not alone in suggesting that the dominant form of masculinity, in sport or any other cultural location, *can* change. The sociologist primarily responsible for promoting the study of hegemonic masculinities, Robert (now Raewyn) Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) also accounts for the contestation and replacement of *any* given form of dominant masculinity. Accordingly, as gender scholars, we all knew that the homophobic, sexist, and violent form of masculinity propagated in competitive teamsports *could* change, but since scholars started studying it seriously in the late 1980s, it had not. This book is significant because I show that things are now finally beginning to change.

DECREASING SOCIAL STIGMA

The premise of this volume is that the esteemed versions of masculinity among university-attending men are changing. However, before discussing inclusive masculinity theory, it is important to note that the changes I see occurring among young men are not germane to gender alone. Recent decades have brought a lessening of orthodox views and institutional control of all types of gender, sexual, and relationship types, in North American and Western European cultures. This is made evident in the growing percentage of people who engage in pre-marital intercourse (Laumann et. al. 1994; Johnson et al. 2001), the social and legal permission for divorce (Jackson and Scott 2004), what some would suggest is a lessening of the traditional double standard for heterosexual intercourse (Tanenbaum 1999; Wolf 1997), and most important to inclusive masculinity theory, the markedly expanded social and political landscape for gays and lesbians (Anderson 2005a, 2008b; Barnett and Thomson 1996; Loftus 2001).

The impact of these shifting cultural attitudes—the increasing loss of our puritan sentiment—is perhaps best illustrated by examining teenagers. For example, whereas teenagers once traded baseball cards, today they trade digital pornography clips obtained from websites. There are no age controls for many of these websites, and no need to register a credit card. The Internet provides anyone the ability to instantly access a display of sexual variety. Here bodies fuck (predominantly for straight and gay men's pleasures) in all combinations, styles, mixtures, manners and video quality. I am not necessarily critiquing this, instead, I think it provides what some feminists concerned with pornography have been calling for all along: not an abolition of pornography, but an explosion of the subjectivities of differing kinds of people in pornography (Ellis, O'Dair and Tallmer 1990).

Gone is the expectation of heterosexual missionary sex (Segal 1994). The Internet has sparked a sexual revolution. How this relates to decreasing stigma about homosexuality is a related matter.

Today's Porntube.com generation see, early and often, sexual images that arouse or entertain them: Whether accidentally or intentionally, my students tell me that they view video clips of gays, lesbians and others once stigmatized by the Victorian cult of heterosexual boredom. Often a heterosexual cannot find his preferred images of heterosexual intercourse without filtering through the images of the acts once so socially tabooed. Curiosity of the other, or perhaps a desire to simply see what others enjoy, tempts the heterosexually-minded young male into clicking on the link, watching what their fathers despised so much. The Internet, I propose, has therefore been instrumental in exposing the forbidden fruit of homosexual sex, commodifying and normalizing it in the process. This, combined with a strategic and political bombardment of positive cultural messages about homosexuality through youth media, MTV, reality television, and other popular venues, has sent a message that while homosexuality is okay, homophobia is not.

Kids are not the only ones working at reducing homophobia, of course. In the years since my athlete was beaten we have seen tremendous cultural and institutional gains for gays and lesbians. Vermont passed Civil Unions in 2000, giving gays and lesbians all the state rights of marriage. And in the summer of 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the 13 states with remaining sodomy laws could no longer enforce them. Just five months after this landmark ruling, the Massachusetts State Supreme Court granted gays and lesbians the right to marry, opening the door to constitutional challenges for gay marriage across the nation. In 2008, California and Connecticut followed, and in 2009 so did Vermont and Iowa.

Important changes have also occurred in Britain. In 2001, the United Kingdom's law (Section 28), prohibiting the discussion of homosexuality in schools, was repealed. In 2006, Britain passed a domestic partnership act granting same-sex couples legal (but not cultural) equality with heterosexuals. And, in 2008, Britain published 'best practice' guidelines for schools, stating that homophobic bullying is not to be tolerated, and recommending that schools include gay history in their curriculum, and introduce youth to gay role models.

These events, and myriad other legal municipal, state, national and European Union rulings, have sparked public debates regarding the status of gays and lesbians in nearly every sector of American and British culture, including cherished American institutions like the Boy Scouts (which has come under increasing fire for their discriminatory practices), and most Judaeo-Christian churches (which frequently fracture over issues pertaining to homosexuality). Furthermore, gays and lesbians are increasingly gaining a normative, albeit mostly desexualized, representation on mainstream television, gaining popularity not only in a large number of shows with gays and lesbians, but also with shows *about* gays and lesbians. It seems

that in the new millennium, Anglo-Americans are increasingly accepting of, perhaps even desensitized to, homosexuality.

All of this is crucial to the discussion of inclusive masculinity theory because my driving theoretical hypothesis is that homophobia directed at men has been central to the production of orthodox masculinity. Homophobia has been used as an ordering principle of valued or subjugated individuals in western cultures (Plummer 1999). Homophobia made hyper-masculinity compulsory for boys, and it made the expression of femininity among boys taboo. When one combines a culture of homophobia, femphobia, and compulsory heterosexuality, one has the makeup of what I call ‘homohysteria.’ Homophobic discourse has therefore been used as a weapon for boys and men to deride one another in establishing this hierarchy (Burn 2000). And because femininity was so deeply entwined with male homosexuality (Kimmel 1994), misogynistic discourse not only served to reproduce gender inequality among men, and between men and women, but it reproduced homophobia, too.

But what happens to the traditional, conservative, orthodox version of masculinity when our culture of homohysteria decreases? What implications might this have on men who were once forced into a narrow ascription of masculinity? I argue that the existence of inclusive masculinities means that there is an awareness that heterosexual men can act in ways once associated with homosexuality, with less threat to their public identity as heterosexual. I show that this has socio-positive effects for straight men, gay men, and women as well.

In the process of explaining my results, I highlight that Connell’s (1987) notion of hegemonic masculinity is unable to capture the complexity of what occurs as cultural homohysteria diminishes. Accordingly, in this book I not only show that masculinities are changing among university-attending, heterosexual youth, but I propose a new social theory to explain this occurrence—inclusive masculinity theory.

INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY THEORY

In this book, I use multiple ethnographies (mostly of athletes) to show that there is significant change occurring to heterosexual masculinities among university-aged (mostly) white men, athletes and non-athletes, alike. Inclusive masculinity theory conceptualizes what happens concerning masculinities in the cultural zeitgeists of three periods within Anglo-American societies: Moments of elevated cultural homohysteria, diminishing cultural homohysteria, and diminished homohysteria. I use the term homohysteria to describe the fear of being homosexualized, as it incorporates three variables: 1) mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation; 2) a cultural zeitgeist of disapproval of homosexuality, and the femininity that is associated with it; and 3) the need for men to publicly

align their social identities with heterosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) in order to avoid homosexual suspicion. In other words, a homophobic culture might look disparagingly at homosexuality, but without mass cultural suspicion that one might be gay it is not a culture of homophobia.

Key to inclusive masculinity theory is that, in moments of higher cultural homophobia, homophobic discourse has traditionally been the most important policing agent of masculinity. Here, homonegative discourse is used to stratify men in deference to a hegemonic mode of dominance (Connell 1987, 1995). And, as multiple masculinity scholars have shown (cf. Plummer 1999), in periods of high homophobia boys and men are compelled to act aggressively and to maintain homophobic and sexist attitudes. In such periods, men are also encouraged to raise their masculine capital through sport and muscularity (cf. Pronger 1990) and they remain emotionally distant from one another. In this culture, boys and men are also expected to boast about their heterosexual accomplishments. It is in this cultural zeitgeist that Kimmel suggests homophobia *is* masculinity (1994), and it is in this zeitgeist that I suggest a culture is homophobic.

In periods of high homophobia, men's gendered terrains are severely limited, as is physical intimacy between men (cf. Ibsen 2002). Accordingly, men's demonstrations of intimacy are generally relegated to the public sphere (such as playing sports), and soft tactility is prohibited. Thus, boys and men have traditionally been prohibited from holding hands, softly hugging, caressing, or kissing (Kaplan 2006). In such cultural moments, boys and men who *do* display physical or emotional intimacy are socially homosexualized and consequently stripped of their perceived masculinity.

However, inclusive masculinity theory argues that in cultures of diminished homophobia, two dominant (but not dominating) forms of masculinity will exist: One conservative and one inclusive. Because the conservative masculinity is not culturally hegemonic, I call this form 'orthodox masculinity.' Here, men remain homophobic, and therefore tactically and emotionally distant from one another. Conversely, heterosexual men ascribing to an 'inclusive masculinity' demonstrate emotional and physically homosexual proximity. They include their gay teammates, and are shown to value heterofemininity. Important in this cultural moment, however, is that neither form of masculinity retains cultural hegemony. In this stage, men who value orthodox masculinity might use homophobic discourse with specific intent to demonize homosexuals, while inclusive acting men may use homophobic discourse but without intent to degrade homosexuals.

Finally, inclusive masculinity theory argues that in an Anglo-American culture of diminished homophobia, homophobic discourse is almost entirely lost, or the meanings associated with it no longer maintain homosexualizing utility. In such a setting, the esteemed attributes of men will no longer rely on control and domination, thus intentional homophobic stigmatization will cease. Inclusive masculinity theory therefore highlights that there will be social inclusion of the form of masculinities that were once

traditionally marginalized by hegemonic masculinity. Accordingly, inclusive masculinity theory maintains that, in such a zeitgeist, multiple masculinities will proliferate with less hierarchy or hegemony. There will also be an expansion of acceptable heteromale behaviors. In other words, when archetypes of inclusive masculinities proliferate, they do not seem to also 'dominate.' This is not simply a matter of a protest version of masculinity competing for cultural hegemony. Inclusive masculinity theory serves as a social-constructionist theory that simultaneously incorporates (during high periods of homophobia) and challenges (during diminishing and diminished periods of cultural homophobia) Connell's (1987) theorizing.

The theme of this book is therefore as much about the equal inclusion of gay men as it is about the inclusion of straight men's femininity. However, there are other socio-positive variables that come from decreased homophobia. I show that inclusive masculinities also lead to decreased sexism, and I suggest that this may help in the erosion of patriarchy. Inclusive masculinity theory also maintains that the gendered behaviors of boys and men will be less differentiated from girls and women in periods of diminished homophobia. In other words, inclusive masculinity theory maintains that in periods of diminished homophobia there will be a reversal of what gender scholars sometimes describe as the separation of gendered spheres (Cancian 1987). In such a culture, the differences between masculinity and femininity, men and women, gay and straight, will be harder to distinguish, and masculinity will no longer serve as the primary method of stratifying men. Claiming that inclusive masculinities exists, explicating the claim through rich, qualitative data from a variety of men in a variety of geographical locations, and framing it with a sophisticated new gender theory, is the project of this book.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

To illustrate the changing relationship between men, masculinity and homophobia, I utilize multiple ethnographies and qualitative investigations in both America and Britain, alongside other researchers' findings. I examine sports that Messner (2002) describes as being *at the center* of masculine production (such as football and basketball), as well as those in the semi-periphery (such as soccer, tennis, and track). I also examine men in sports traditionally marginalized by mainstream, competitive sports (cheerleading, bowling, and figure skating), to see if masculinity operates differently throughout this stratification. Also, because Michael Messner (2004) theorizes that the more competitive a team is, the less freedom there is for variable conceptions of athletic masculinity, I interview athletes from both low and high quality teams, hoping to better understand the operation of masculinity throughout the institutional progression of sport. Data represented in this research is drawn from the following ethnographies.