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A Typology

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Many straight men experience and demonstrate "queer masculinity," defined here as ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine. This article proposes language and a typology for such men: (1) straight sissy boys, (2) social justice straight-queers, (3) elective straight-queers, (4) committed straight-queers, and (5) males living in the shadow of masculinity. The benefit of building a typology of straight-queer masculinities is to begin to give voice and legitimacy to the queerness that exists within the straight male world. Naming the diversity of masculinity and its relationship to queerness will ideally provoke greater discourse on the topic and, ideally, extend awareness of the influence of the hegemonically straight masculine context not only over gay men but straight males as well.

Key words: masculinity; queer; men; gender; hetero-normativity

Many straight men experience and demonstrate "queer masculinity," defined here as ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine. The hegemonic hetero-masculine is represented culturally in the icons of religion, sports, historical figures, economic and political leaders, and the entertainment industry. In these arenas, males are presumed to be straight and hold stereotypically masculine beliefs, attitudes, and values unless and until they present themselves as other.

The queer masculinities of straight men do not have a similar representation, and they lack legitimacy as a form of masculinity. Frequently, straight males perceived to be queer or who actively disrupt both hetero-normativity and hegemonic masculinity are problematized. The heterosexual male who has sex with another male is represented in film or novels as someone struggling with sexual identity, who must be at least bisexual (and in a religious

context as someone who has sinned). The "sensitive" (translation: "sissy") young boy in films such as *Stand By Me* is portrayed as needing the protection and guidance of an older, hetero-normative masculine boy. In sociological and psychological literature, straight males-with-queerness may be identified as deviant or pathologized for being gender inappropriate or sexually confused. On the street and in their schools, family, or workplace, openly queer straight males may be stigmatized or seen as a curiosity and may find themselves positioned along with gay males in a world that is "other" and thus vulnerable to homophobic oppression.

Consider the male who identifies as a feminist and gay advocate. He is apt to be perceived as gay and may not feel welcome in the company of stereotypically straight males. This is particularly the case if he also refuses to participate in traditional male culture (e.g. if he does not attend sports games or questions the value of competitive and contact sports or prefers lesbian or feminist vocalists such as Indigo Girls, Melissa Etheridge, or Ani DiFranco). Consider the fate of the straight male who is sexual, or sensually close with another male and openly acknowledges the relationship, even while defining himself as straight.

Each of these examples describes elements of the queer masculinities of straight men. They suggest a queering of hetero-masculinity in a variety of ways. However, we do not have a language or framework for considering the ways straight men can disrupt the dominant paradigm of the straight-masculine nor a language that gives legitimacy to the lived experience.

In this article, I propose a typology of straight-queer males—males who disrupt both heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity—as a contribution to the expansion of the conceptualization of straightness and of masculinity. It is an attempt to represent a truer picture than has been articulated of straight males' experiences and ways of being. Such a typology is needed for several reasons. First, it allows us to expand on the very notion of what is legitimized as being hetero-masculine. It allows us to "trouble" both gender and sexuality as suggested by Judith Butler (1990), Michel Foucault (1979), and others. And more specifically, it allows us, in Sandra Bem's words, to "turn the volume up" on gender and sexuality by acknowledging the broadest possible range of what exists (Bem 1995).

Second, Bem's (1995) proposal supports the acknowledgement and affirmation of elements of sexualized masculinity that have historically been treated as an exception, given that there has been one monolithic conceptualization of heterosexual men who do not conform as being "nontraditional." "Traditional males," on the one hand, are the ones society understands; even if there are problems associated with the image, there is acceptance and legitimacy accorded to the typicalness of his presentation. The "nontraditional" male, however, presents an unknown, unfamiliar package; even if qualities the male exhibits are desirable, his difference demands justification, explanation. Being "non" means "not having." Applied to gender and sexuality, the

implications are profound. The very labeling of a person as the absence of something (such as labeling women as "nonmen") reifies the dominant group while subjugating the subordinate. "Non" erases. And in the process, it problematizes other. For a straight-queer man, there is no place for awareness of self in relation to what is. He becomes the deviant, he is isolated, and in the process, he is vulnerable to reactions in the form, for instance, of stigma and labeling by the dominant group. "Non" has no history, no literature, no power, no community. "Non" requires an invention of self.

By creating a typology of queer masculinities of straight males, we give space and language to lived experience and set the stage on which narratives of straight-queer men can find a home. My own experience of being a straight-queer man has contributed to my interest in creating a language through which I could come to know myself and come to have agency in the knowing.

Recently a new acquaintance, a straight male, told me that if he did not know I was married with three children, that he would have assumed I was gay. Since hearing this perception is not an uncommon experience for me, I asked him the question I usually ask men (and women) who assume my sexual orientation to be gay: why? His response was typical: I talk with my hands, my voice is not deep, I care nothing about major sports, I am clearly a feminist and talk about gender, rape, violence, and I question male socialization (of course, I also teach and write in the areas of gender and sexuality!). He has also seen me greet close male friends by kissing them on the lips, hugging deeply, and at a social gathering, dancing together. "Must be gay!"

It has always bothered me that I had come to define myself (and be defined by others) as "nontraditional." Unless I were to give up what I feel to be my authentic self, I could not "do" traditional i.e., hegemonic straight masculinity, without changing (1) what I find comfortable in terms of my body, (2) the intimacy I desire in my relationships with other men, (3) my sexual and sensual awareness, and (4) my politics that are informed by feminist and queer theory.

As the scenarios below illustrate,[1] the need for new thinking about sexuality and masculinity goes beyond just my personal experience.

Six stories follow:

1. Sam, a 36-year-old graduate student, advertised through a heterosexual dating service with a headline reading, "'Must be gay?' Well, think again sister!!" The ad clarified that women (and men) had often perceived him to be gay. Sam told me that he does not attempt to hide whatever characteristics lead people to that perception since he associates his "gay" presentation with having an interest in topics women are interested in, as well as his body posture and gestures. He often finds himself being "one of the girls" at social gatherings, where men are in one corner talking about sports while he is engaged in conversation with women about politics, books, feminism, and cooking. Sam may be considered "nonconforming" to male gender

expectations and certainly "nontraditional." However, such labels suggest that his actions are problematic, although, for him, they are not. Instead, Sam is one among many straight identified males who disrupt masculinity and do so by queering—presenting queerly in hetero-masculinized spaces.

2. Eric, a 7th grader, decides to "come out" to his soccer teammates as being opposed to their homophobic and sexist remarks. He also decides to befriend Thomas, another boy on the soccer team who is ridiculed for being gay, possibly because of his physical appearance, his choice of music (described by teammates as heavily weighted toward girly bands), and his unwillingness to engage in the homophobic and sexist talk among the soccer team. While both Eric and Thomas may perceive themselves to be "straight" in sexual orientation, they are, as straight males, participating in the queering up of heterosexual masculinity. Eric, for what he describes as social justice reasons, is making a conscious decision that contributes to the queering process. Thomas, on the other hand, does not participate in hetero-masculine conformity because, perhaps, it just does not fit who he is. His actions may or may not be politically or consciously made, but in either case, they are disrupting the hegemonic hetero-masculine.

3. Andy is 30 years old, straight, and identifies as somewhat of a gay spirit. He has never found himself sexually aroused by males, but for the past five years, he has primarily gone clubbing (dancing at nightclubs) and hung out primarily with gay males. His roommate is gay, as are most of his best male friends. Andy attends gay strip shows that have included performances of sexual acts. He says the experience has allowed him to let go of his inhibitions when it comes to his body and dancing and to find comfort in an environment of men. In addition, he says, he has "created a great wardrobe" that contributes to the flamboyance he brings with him to his position as a popular art teacher in a progressive high school. Andy was recently married, with his gay friends, among others, in attendance, to a woman who initially did not pursue dating him because she assumed he was gay.

4. Jay, Elliot, and Sol were students together at a progressive (alternative) public high school that had a relatively strong support system for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) youth. While being strong advocates themselves for rights of gays on social justice grounds, they each identify as straight and are sexual with females. At the same time, they share a bed when they sleep over at each other's houses and support one of them who wears skirts when attending rock festivals. Jay and Sol may hug and kiss when greeting in public (in the center of the shopping district) and talk with other male friends about enjoying the way they can flirt with each other. Jay says he has another male friend who is gay and whom he thinks is sexy. He would like to have sex with him to know what it was like. However, the attraction does not appear to be mutual. Jay has also told his girlfriend about his interest and received a supportive response. In college, Jay also had two male roommates he could kiss on the lips and hug when greeting as well as snuggle with while watching a video and enjoying a beer or sharing a joint. When one of Jay's roommates expressed a desire to have sex with him, Jay allowed a small amount of sexual play but decided he was not interested in pursuing it. The attraction was not there for Jay. Afterward, they talked about the experience, processing their feelings; they also shared the story of their experience with other straight males in their friendship group. They continued to live together through graduation and remain close, as they project, lifelong friends.

5. Both Tim and Jon, college students, define as straight. They desire sexual relationships with women, talking specifically about their love of cunnilingus, vaginal intercourse, and the feel of women's bodies. They both have girlfriends with whom they are sexually active. Tim and Jon are each other's best friend and describe themselves publicly as being "boyfriends." They say they like to queer straight space as a political act, but they also simply love being intimate and exploring the ways to be in relationship with each other. When alone, they have engaged in kissing and sexual play with each other. Jon states that this has allowed him to more fully practice his sexuality. Tim, a former high school football player, says that at some point he would like to have oral sex (both active and passive) with Jon and to experience anal penetration. Tim, a sexuality educator and advocate on his campus, introduced Jon to wearing skirts. Initially, they did this when they were home and with their girlfriends or at parties with gay and lesbian friends. More recently, they have periodically worn skirts on campus and, at times, held hands when walking together. Neither Tim nor Jon see themselves as bisexual or gay. They do however question whether those categories make any sense for them or anyone. And they see both their private and public actions as contributing to society becoming freed up from labels.

6. Ted, Jerry, and Michael are also straight male college students, but they are "hiding in the shadow of masculinity." They sit quietly in the back of the classroom, baseball caps on backwards, seldom displaying emotions in response to anything being discussed. Such students seldom speak out in class and only do so when called on. In their dorms, they play computer games and do not socialize much with the "jocks" in the hallways or the guys who get drunk most nights and throw up in the bathrooms. They are quiet, almost easy for me to ignore as I go on with my lecture in a hall with a hundred students. Yet when I read their essays on gender and masculinity for the sociology course I am teaching, I see that all three express frustration with all the guys they know who act out, who are loud and so often drunk, who are homophobic and sexist. Ted, it turns out, is the son of a single mother who he says has raised him to be sensitive and aware. Jerry describes his father as loving and close, a man who shares his feelings, gives hugs, and is nurturing. Michael describes how his sisters have given him guidance and support in his refusal to participate in the type of male behavior that is perceived as typically masculine. What is notable about all three men is that they "get it" to some degree and resist participation in hetero-normative masculinity, yet they do not speak out against homophobia or portray nonnormative ways of being. They wear their baseball caps, play video games, and do not take risks.

While describing differing tales of resistance, what all of these stories have in common is the disruption at some level of hegemonic hetero-masculinity. The males represented come from differing life stages and levels of actions, yet the range of differences suggest the value of creating a typology.

As a starting point in building a typology of queer-straight males, I propose the following five categories. The categories are nonlinear and nonhierarchical. They are clearly not exclusive—aspects of the above scenarios are likely to fit with a greater or lesser degree of comfort in one or in all categories.

I.   Straight sissy boys;
II. Social-justice straight-queers;
III. Elective straight-queers (or the elective queer);
IV. Committed straight-queers; and
V.   Males living in the shadow of masculinity.

I. STRAIGHT SISSY BOYS

These are straight males who just cannot "do" straight masculinity. The sissy boy presents to others as queer, though that is not his intention nor identity, and experiences a response from the dominant culture, and perhaps from queers, as being queer. These males experience homophobic oppression for their apparent queerness, particularly as young males when they are taunted and even attacked. They are likely to be isolated from straight male culture and/or choose to separate themselves from the dominant male culture. Straight sissy boy males may associate primarily with girls and women as opposed to actively engaging in gay male friendship and social networks, perhaps in part because of a desire to not be seen as being gay, beyond what is already perceived by other straight males.

Straight sissy boy males have varying degrees of homophobia or comfort and discomfort with homosexualities. Being perceived as gay by others is not necessarily a conscious choice, and thus, they may not have a conscious openness to the effect they have on queering their environment. Yet just the existence of males who appear as "nonstraight" because they do not fit the image of the normative hetero-masculine serves to disrupt that masculinity and sexuality just by the sissy boy showing up as straight.

Examples

Sam's (no. 1) story suggests elements of the sissy boy male. He has learned to value his presentation that leads others to perceive him as being gay. He uses it in his ad to find a partner. He readily acknowledges that he finds it comfortable to be with females and is less identified with the gay community.

Andy (no. 3) effects the sissy boy male type by adorning himself in flamboyant clothing, inspired by gay-male culture, to wear to school.

While 12-year-old Thomas (no. 2) may or may not intend to project an image of the sissy through his choice of music, he does choose not to change, even given threats from others.

Tim and John (no. 5), by wearing skirts and referring to each other as boyfriends, effect sissyness and play this out in straight masculine space, thus becoming identified with femaleness and female culture (particularly since gay/queer culture is still too scary, not desirable, and not present).

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE STRAIGHT-QUEERS

Males in this category take action publicly and at the risk of being responded to as if they were gay. Thus, their actions represent risk taking, placing the straight-queer in a position of being threatened, stigmatized, or violated as a result of association with gayness. A key element in this category is the public expression by straight males, verbally or through action, in ways that disrupt both heterosexuality and masculinity.

Examples

Both Eric and Thomas (no. 2), middle school–age boys, can be seen as fitting into this category, though their actions are different. Eric is consciously a public advocate who chooses to be friendly with Thomas, while Thomas pursues his behaviors (does not attempt to adapt to normative hetero-masculinity) even though he is threatened. Simply by refusing to adapt, they become, or risk becoming, queers because they are a threat to the status quo. Aspects of most of the people in the six scenarios fit into this category to a greater or lesser extent.

III. ELECTIVE STRAIGHT-QUEERS
(OR THE ELECTIVE QUEER)

Elective queer identity can be seen as straight men performing queer masculinity. Males in this category elect to move into queer masculinity as a means of liberating the self from the constrictions of hetero-normative masculinity. Such males can move with varying degrees of comfort back into "straight masculinity" without necessarily losing power within the dominant culture. Straight men can "flirt" with queerness. They take on queer characteristics and kiss, dance, dress, and move the body queer-ly, but within the context (setting) of the queer world where it is safe, i.e., the gay bar, having fun with the straight or gay roommate, participation in gay-dominant environments such as parties or gay-identified professions.

Example

Andy (no. 3) perhaps is most illustrative of this category. He is using queer space to expand his sense of his masculinity. At the same time, he has the experience of developing and strengthening relationships with males who are gay and bringing his queer wardrobe into his everyday, public life.

IV. COMMITTED STRAIGHT-QUEERS

Different from the elective queers, committed straight-queers practice at being queer with the intention of benefiting from moving toward queerness as an integral aspect of their sexuality and their masculinity. While the elective straight-queer may or may not be interested in learning about queerness to expand sexual and gender boundaries, this is clearly the intent for those in this category.

Examples

Tim and John (no. 5) are intentional in both their public and private exploration of queerness. They disrupt the hetero-normative masculine when alone to experience their private sexuality. When in public, their behaviors are political but also a means to express gender in a way that is increasingly comfortable and familiar to them. In a similar way, Jay, Elliot, and Sol (no. 4) are pursuing a queering of straight male relationships through sexual gestures and openness in public and private, in addition to Jay's ability to queer his friendship with his roommate through being somewhat sexual.

V. MALES LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF MASCULINITY

Some men who hide in the shadow of masculinity are what we might call "informed inactive". They are informed about sexuality and masculinity and are likely to understand and support feminism as well as gay rights. They are straight but not "narrow" in terms of knowledge and even attitudes on the subject of gender and sexuality. They may find ways to display behind-the-scenes support for queer gay men but are not comfortable with queer straight men or with putting themselves in positions publicly where they might be perceived as gay.

Thus, they are unlikely to display nonconforming behaviors or appear in queer space unless accompanied by a girlfriend or female friend. They are also unlikely to take any personal risks with close friends or present themselves through body posture, language, or appearance as queer and particularly not do so with straight male friends in public. In private space with close friends or with women, such males may take on nonhegemonic male appearance or behavior, i.e., talking seriously and respectfully about homosexuality, cross-dressing in front of a girlfriend, talking cute and sweet with nonmasculinized language when in bed with their female partner, or even lying in their partner's arms, being held and cuddled. Generally, this category represents men who are informed and knowledgeable but who remain behind the scenes when it comes to changes for themselves in the presentation and

experience of heterosexual masculinity or public advocacy and support for changes in the system.

A further subset of these "informed inactives" are the males we might call "scared stuck." They can talk the language of queerness, openly have gay friends, and go to gay clubs, but they cannot "do gay"—cannot transcend into being physically close (not necessarily sexual) with another male and would not feel comfortable if others perceived them to be gay, even though they are comfortable with being an ally to gays. Such men (including many high school or college males) may have an intellectual awareness of the limits of straight masculinity and a desire to be different," but do not know how to move there; they lack the confidence or perception that they can go beyond the intellectual "acceptance" of queer masculinity. They may cheer others on but not go into the experiential sphere of queer masculinity because it does not have an acceptable model in the straight world. They may do "queer" within the context of a guided experience, such as a men's workshop, or in hidden, secretive ways perhaps; more likely, they will intellectually "get it," but performance-wise, they cannot "do it."

Another place on the spectrum of "shadow males" are those who are also inactive in any intentional queering, but are unaware. Such males may realize they do not "fit" within traditional straight masculinity and are not necessarily comfortable with the status quo, but they do not perceive that change is possible, individually or culturally. These males do not appear gay or connect to a queer world in any way, but they also do not do straight hegemonic masculinity. Having no awareness of what queer masculinity is, their life in the "shadow of masculinity" leads them to do enough straight masculinity to get by, which means wearing appropriate male clothing so they do not stand out and knowing enough about normative hetero-masculine expectations to "pass." If they are on a construction crew of men who act out their hetero-masculinity in their language and behavior, they might choose to eat alone at lunchtime. If they are sitting with other straight men who are talking in hypermasculine, sexist, or homophobia terms, they will not attempt to change the topic, but neither will they participate. Rather, they fade into the background. In college, they are the men who stay in their rooms, away from the noise of masculinity that ripples through the hallways (the "hey, look at me!" noise of the masculinized corridor). They do not do hyperstraight male language—do not say "cunt" or "let's go have a few brews," or know the names of NFL players. They avoid the hypermale scene whenever possible.

Males living in the shadow of masculinity are sweet guys perhaps, but they also can be pretty shut down emotionally, in part because straight male emotions such as anger do not fit them and they do not allow themselves "female emotions" such as sadness or fear. It is safer to not say anything, not show anything, and attempt to get by. The body of these men is not represented in the image of straight or gay masculinities; there is no appearance of an image of "self"— no public voice, only quiet knowing of being "

different," a self-identity of being "non." They may live inside the space of computers, musical instruments, books, or other such places that provide safety from the storm of hetero-normative masculinity. Almost by the nature of living in the shadow, they seek each other out and "play" most of their lives with other men who quietly "go along" with the mainstream but are never fully engaged in the dominant hetero-masculine world.

GIVING LEGITIMACY
TO QUEER MASCULINITY

The benefit of building a typology of queer masculinities is to begin to give voice and legitimacy to the queerness that exists within the straight male world. This article presents my developing constructions for these categories, drawing from examples of men I know who appear to "fit" as case examples into each or several of the categories. This typology is an attempt to provide a framework for pursuing a more formal investigation. Naming the diversity of masculinity and its relationship to queerness will ideally provoke greater discourse on the topic and extend awareness of the influence of the hegemonically straight masculine, not only over gay men, but straight males as well.

Of course, there is fluidity in these categories. Males may move around. Once punished for sissyness, a male may move to shadow masculinity, learning how to put out straight masculine messages, though not wearing the identity comfortably. The sissy boy male may take up weight lifting or intentionally lower his voice when around other males. He is accommodating to the oppression of sissy-queer masculinity by running from it to survive. Situationally and developmentally, males might move through the categories—the "electively queer" male may stay there during college (like women who try being lesbian during these years), then move into the "comfort" of straight masculinity.

There are many questions to explore, questions such as what is the attraction of moving outside the hetero-masculine norm? What is gained? Is this "using" queerness as a cover, to avoid dealing with straight masculine environments where threats are great? Do elective straight males in queer space privilege straightness at the expense of queers? Is this an honoring of queerness or a use? Is there a difference between queer experiences by straight males that takes place in private space versus public space?

These forms of masculinity represent something much more than just men who are "nontraditional." Rather, they suggest a masculinity and male heterosexuality that extends the reach of societal perceptions of either and one that for each of these males allows the potential for evolving a broadened definition. The result may be expanded norms and expectations for who straight men are and who they can be. Queering masculinity is not just gender

bending. Males with long hair and multiple earrings may be playing with their presentation of being male, but it is different from the male whose attitudes and behaviors toward other males disrupt homophobia and hetero-normativity.

Why are the types of males discussed in this article disrupting hetero-masculinity? It is because these males queer the environment of the hetero-masculine by not, for whatever reason, fully participating. And they provide a hiding place for males who are queer and do not feel safe or competent to pass in hetero-sexualized masculine environments. Queer-straight males respective refusal to actively participate in the dominant system serves to stall the system itself. Their absence, and at the very least, their lack of full participation in hetero-masculine culture, weakens the system of oppression that is an essential part of normative hetero-masculinity.

Creating a language for queer-straight males in itself is a queering of hegemonic hetero-masculinity. It is an attempt to change social attitudes around both male sexuality and masculinity and provide support for both those in the trenches of queerness and those males who are in the shadows. It turns the volume up, giving legitimacy and voice to a way of being for queer straight males.

NOTE

1. The stories are synthesized from experiences that students and other men in my life have shared with me. Names have been changed.

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