Policing manhood: new theories about the social significance of homophobia[1]

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Introduction

Homophobia is not what it seems to be. While homophobia is typically defined as a 'fear or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality' (Brown 1993: 1254), this paper examines data in support of a much broader social significance. In what probably reflects this lack of certainty, many writers have attempted to invent new names for homophobia or alternatively, to confine its use to its literal sense as a reference to genuine phobias (Churchill 1967, Hudson and Rickets 1980, Hansen 1982, Fyfe 1983, Haaga 1991, Marshall 1994). Others seem to have adopted different explanatory frameworks in an attempt to 'nail down' homophobia and engage with it, for example, by equating it with 'heterosexism', anti-homosexual bias or as a variant of misogyny (Haaga 1991, Neisen 1990). The evidence detailed in this paper, suggests that none of these approaches is entirely satisfactory. Moreover, data will be examined which offers alternative explanations for this pervasive and poorly understood phenomenon. In doing so, a case will be made that homophobia is much broader than what most explanations allow for, and that in countless insidious ways homophobia has major consequences for all men, gay or not.

Key developmental observations

We start by exploring how males come to comprehend homophobia as they mature. Recent research by the author at the Australian National University examined the developmental experiences of young men who spent most of their school years in Australia (for full details see Plummer 1999). Detailed interviews concerning how young men were exposed to and learned about gender and sexuality were collected and analyzed. Quotations used to illustrate this paper are taken from that research.

The ways in which boys reach an understanding of homophobia was found to follow very similar patterns independently in different schools and in different parts of Australia. These findings echo work done in Britain and the United States, even though homophobia was not the principal focus of those studies (Mac an Ghaill 1994, Thorne 1993). Homophobic words like 'poofter' and 'faggot' generally enter boys' talk during mid primary school. Initially these words do not carry sexual connotations, but neither are they meaningless, or randomly deployed. On the contrary, from their earliest use, words like poofter are highly meaningful, their meanings are precisely mapped in peer culture, and they play an important role in school ground politics (Rofes 1995: 82). For example, evidence that important meanings precede the anti-gay content includes that, from its earliest use 'poofter' is considered a derogatory term and is never applied to girls. Thus, homophobic terms are gendered from the outset - in the sense that 'poofter' and 'faggot' are specifically used to target boys - and this usage is established long before any reference to homosexuality arises (Rofes 1995: 82).

> I'm fairly sure that the initial associations of 'poofter' weren't so much sexually oriented. It was a case of meaning you were a bit of a girl. Meaning that you were weak and woosy and liable to cry. (Participant H)

A closer examination of the evolution of homophobic terms reveals that many layers of meaning are progressively incorporated into words like poofter as boys get older (a process called 'onion-skinning', Plummer 1999). For example, boys who cry or are not considered to be 'tough' are at risk of attracting homophobic labels. Poofter can also be used to target certain behaviors, actions and appearances rather than (or as well as) targeting individuals. Under these circumstances, shoes that are too shiny, hair that is too neat or clothes that are too 'flamboyant' are considered suspect. In one case a boy described having a particular brand of soap in a boarding school where most boys used a different product (Plummer 1999: 55). This difference was enough for him to be labeled a 'poofter'. In another case, the use of a hair-drier was considered highly suspect (p. 54). In all descriptions, subtle but apparently significant departures from collective standards are sufficient to trigger homophobic responses from peers.

While the characteristics that trigger homophobia seem to relate to gender, there are many for which cross-gender transgression does not seem to offer a satisfactory explanation. For example, boys risk homophobia if they distinguish themselves by achieving high school grades, are obedient pupils, or are teacher's favorite. This is an interesting finding because intellectual pursuits and rationality have traditionally been considered to be part of the masculine domain (Lloyd 1984, Connell 1995). Moreover, the picture becomes even more complicated because, in addition to accumulating meaning, homophobic triggers can shift as boys get older, sometimes to the point of contradicting earlier codes. Perhaps the most striking example of this 'rule reversal' is seen in boys' relationships with girls. During primary school, peer culture expresses a strong expectation that boys should socialize only with other boys (what I call 'compulsory homosociality', Plummer 1999: 294, Clark 1987). During this period, associating too closely with girls is considered to be potentially contaminating ('girls' germs'), and boys who associate too closely with girls are vulnerable to homophobia. In contrast, the shift between primary and secondary school is so dramatic that by mid secondary school boys who don't associate closely enough with girls are considered suspect (what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality', Rich 1980).

By early-mid secondary school, homophobic words are rich with significance and there are complex codes governing their use. Around this time these terms acquire sexual connotations - almost as a final layer in the successive construction of meaning. Nevertheless, despite their unequivocal sexual dimensions, homophobic words retain their previous meanings throughout adulthood. Thus, even when it is possible to infer sexual orientation by using labels like poofter and faggot, qualities like softness, weakness and effeminacy among others can be inferred simultaneously.

Since starting in mid primary school, the frequency, intensity and severity of homophobic terms typically crescendos and peaks in early to mid secondary years. There is also a clear ranking of school ground terms of abuse and, based on a number

of different indicators, it is possible to establish that words like poofter are considered to be particularly severe and stigmatizing. At this stage, words like poofter are used frequently, particularly in peer-group settings during recesses, lunch breaks and on the journey to and from school. Homophobia is also highly visible in graffiti and as a theme in the physical jostling of the schoolyard (Plummer1999: 65-70). Based on these observations, a 'social geography' of homophobia can be mapped and locations can be identified where homophobia is most frequent and most aggressively prosecuted. This mapping process also makes it possible to define 'safety' and 'danger' zones. Danger zones typically include sports grounds; toilets; change rooms; at secluded locations on the school perimeter such as behind a thicket of trees; and on the journey to and from school, particularly in laneways and on the school bus. Typical safety zones include classrooms, libraries, hallways, close to school buildings, in the proximity of staff room entrances and more recently, in front of computer lab screens.

> ...there was one guy who was the 'computer nerd from hell!'. He just sat in front of the computer every lunch time, every break he got... he would never play sport, he was worse than me, he had more notes than I ever had - forged notes - the best signatures you've ever seen. He was a 'poofter' as well, but he wasn't gay. (Participant T)

The topography of homophobia reveals that 'poofter' and related terms are used predominantly in locations that are removed from adult scrutiny. This observation offers at least a partial explanation why other studies have found that teachers generally underestimate bullying (Hazler, Hoover & Oliver 1993; Rigby & Slee 1991). On the other hand, if these dynamics occur largely independently of adults, then there are questions about where homophobic meanings come from and how they are propagated. The explanation appears to be related to 'rolling peer pressure' (Plummer 1999). According to this mechanism, other boys, particularly older siblings and boys in classes above them, generally induct younger boys into homophobic codes. Thus 'rolling peer pressure' provides a mechanism whereby complex meanings and conventions can be passed along generations of school boys while largely evading adult intervention, and almost regardless of what changes are taking place in the adult world. It also means that adults will need to unlearn homophobic attitudes instilled during their development, rather than never having held such views in the first place.

> It would be more likely kids from higher up. Kids start learning. They hear them calling someone that [fag]. So they think it's the cool thing to do and they start. They see someone different and they immediately say 'Oh, he's a fag.' (Participant B)

In late secondary school the intensity of homophobia seems to subside. Perhaps this is because bullies and/or their targets 'drop out' or because pursuits such as academic achievement (previously quite stigmatized by homophobic convention) become increasingly important. Alternatively it might be because the fluidity and reorganization of homophobia and the uncertainties of the maturation process are largely complete, and boys' social positions and their male identities have started to stabilize. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that the intense homophobic experiences

of the preceding years will ever be completely overcome. Moreover, while not wishing to diminish the extreme difficulties that gay adolescents face - of coming to terms with such an intensely stigmatized aspect of their self - it is interesting that homophobic pressures ease at the very time when adult homosexual identity starts to emerge and when some boys are starting to conclude that they are gay. Perhaps this is another indication that some of the most stigmatized aspects of homophobia lie not in its narrow bias against homosexuals but in some broader taboo?

> ...from year ten onwards the 'faggot' name calling thing just seemed to disperse. (Participant L)

It might be tempting to explain this 'detumesence' of homophobic activity by attributing the prior crescendo of homophobia to boys who are fighting against their own homosexual self and the subsequent easing to those boys becoming resigned to being homosexual. However, this argument is susceptible to a homophobic interpretation of its own – that maladjusted homosexuals cause most homophobia! This interpretation is unsustainable. It is clear from a numerous studies that homophobia is a widespread, modern social phenomenon, which infiltrates many mainstream institutions and far exceeds the minority of people who become gay or lesbian (Berrill 1992, Hendriks, Tielman and van der Veen 1993) . On the other hand, the argument might be sustainable if it refers to young men who are destined to be heterosexual, but who are struggling with deeply held adolescent fears that they may not measure up.

Meanings
By examining the factors involved in provoking homophobia, it is possible to compile a catalogue of meanings associated with it. These meanings can be organized according to consistent themes, themes that offer important insights into the social significance of homophobia. Moreover, by organizing meanings according to when they enter a boy's repertoire and become generally understood by his peers, the processes involved in constructing homophobic meaning can be mapped. This enables conclusions to be drawn about the foundations of homophobic prejudice.

An early characteristic of homophobic terms is their association with childish behavior and with boys who act like babies. Thus, while crying can provoke terms such as 'cry-baby', it also attracts homophobic responses, particularly to boys who fail to restrain themselves in the presence of their peers. Similarly, boys who are slow to reach physical maturity are also at risk of homophobic scrutiny and perhaps it is not surprising that boys who are 'late developers' feel particularly vulnerable in change rooms. In these scenarios, immaturity appears to be a widely recognized trigger for homophobia. (Frosh 1994: 109, Gilmore 1990: 29)

Second, there is a set of homophobic meanings, which relate to group conformity. In particular, to boys who don't belong to a peer group, or who don't conform to peer group expectations. This is particularly apparent in sports (Messner 1992, Pronger 1990a, Pronger 1990b). Boys are least vulnerable to homophobia if they participate in tough team sports; more vulnerable if they play less physical solo activities; and are highly vulnerable (but physically safer) if they avoid sports altogether. Similarly, boys who are special, different, elitist, aloof, or who stand apart from their peers, are

suspect. Moreover, showing too much allegiance to figures outside of the peer group is also risky. For example, being too neatly dressed is perceived as conforming too much to parental expectations, and being too willing to please teachers is seen as being too compliant with school authorities. In both cases conformity is considered to be at the expense of peer group solidarity and each of these scenarios appears to leave a boy vulnerable to homophobic criticism.

> The stigma bounced onto me and the label stuck. Because I wasn't going to do what they were doing, I was a 'poofter'. (Participant T)

A third set of meanings associated with homophobic terms relates to boys who are considered too weak, too gentle, pacifists or who lack courage. Boys who express emotions, which are considered to signify vulnerability (such as fear, sadness and affection) and those who are not strong or physically competent, are also at risk. In these examples, a lack of physical strength, assertiveness and aggression seem to be involved in prompting homophobia. Physicality is a key yardstick against which stereotypical masculinity is measured and physical 'under-achievement' (weakness, delayed development, avoidance of team sports) renders a boy vulnerable to homophobic labeling. Moreover, physicality also has a counterpoint in studiousness, and this also contributes to the homophobic construction of academic achievement.

Fourth, a boy's relationship with girls influences how susceptible he is to homophobic labeling. A boy is likely to be called a poof if he is too 'feminine', or if he transgresses in dress codes. Furthermore, as we have already observed, if he associates too closely with girls in his early school years or not closely enough in his later years, particularly if he doesn't objectify them, he risks being called a fag.

Finally, once homophobic terms acquire sexual connotations, boys who are aggressively heterosexual are least vulnerable to homophobia, those who are bisexual or 'active' homosexuals are more so, and boys who are believed to be 'passive' homosexuals are particularly vulnerable. It should be noted that when homophobia is used as a sexual accusation, it is generally based on 'surrogate markers' such as the various non-sexual characteristics outlined above, and almost never on observing sexual activity or knowing details of a person's sex life. Further, it is clear from the accounts that boys who attract homophobia need not be gay, first because these processes are well developed before they reach sexual maturity and second because the 'surrogate markers' would seem to have very little to do with sexual practice (Dollimore 1991).

A more comprehensive catalogue of homophobic meanings and their nuances and chronological dimensions can be found in Plummer (1999), however table 1 summarizes the main classes of meaning identified in that study.

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Homophobia, gender and sexuality

Earlier in this paper it was observed that homophobic terms are gendered from their earliest use. This conclusion was reached because informants consistently reported that terms like poofter and faggot are only ever used against boys – and that applying them to girls seems meaningless. In the previous section some of the layers of homophobic meaning were outlined. What became clear is that irrespective of sexual orientation, boys are vulnerable to homophobic attack if they are immature, weak, wimpy, woosy, overly-emotional, pacifists; if they don't participate in tough team sports or don't belong to a peer-group; if they are loners, aloof, elitist or different; if they are conscientious in class or conform too closely to adult expectations; and depending on their mannerisms, appearance and style of dress. In all of these cases, homophobia seems to focus on certain fault lines in gender. On the other hand, homophobic meanings are not invoked simply by the presence of feminine characteristics. Thus while it has been argued that masculinity is a relational concept which depends on contrasts with femininity (Connell 1987), the gender transgressions targeted by homophobia do not seem to depend purely on a masculine-feminine dichotomy.

In his recent work, *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) positions homosexuality as a subordinated member in a range of contemporary masculinities. However, our examination the use of homophobic constructs reveals that an alternative framework seems to apply among boys and young men. Rather than being a subordinated form of masculinity, homophobia positions 'the poofter' and 'the faggot' in opposition to all masculinities – as a lack of masculinity and/or as betrayal of male solidarity. Rather than signifying a boundary between masculine and feminine or between one masculine form and another, in the minds of boys and young men, homophobia patrols an intragender divide between successful collective masculinity and male otherness.

It is in this formulation that the gendered nature of homophobia becomes clear. Rather than simply targeting a masculine-feminine boundary or sexual orientation, homophobia is concerned with an *intragender* division between males who are sufficiently masculine and those who exhibit signs to the contrary. This intragender boundary lies at the foundations of homophobia. It reminds us that gender is not simply an oppositional dichotomy between male and female (even if that is its origins) (Connell 1987, 1995). Given that the category 'male' exists, it is possible to create classes within that category - for example males who conform and measure up – and it is also possible to identify failures, outcasts and traitors. In effect, there is a dichotomy active in this divide, but it delineates the split between what is sufficiently masculine and individuals considered to be suspect or lacking. While this split can include cross-gender transgressions and homosexual orientation, it can and does accommodate much more – it sanctions and polices stereotypical standards of masculinity and it proscribes immaturity and peer group betrayal too. Homophobia seems to arise from a more general preoccupation that boys should not deviate from the quest to become physically mature, peer-oriented, powerful, sexually potent men. In the modern homophobic configuration of this intragender divide, males who fail to conform to collective expectations, who lack sufficient 'masculinity', who betray masculine solidarity are positioned as modern day heretics called poofters or faggots.

Homophobic power

Homophobia plays a powerful role in male peer culture (Mac an Ghaill 1994, Plummer 1999). For example, words like poofter are considered to be among the most challenging terms to be used by boys, and are often accompanied by expectations that their reputation is at stake and their honor should be defended. Other descriptions reveal that words like poofter are deeply hurtful and boys develop various maneuvers to avoid homophobia - such as monitoring and carefully styling their behavior, deflecting scrutiny by labeling others first, avoiding 'danger zones' and seeking the security of groups.

> [Homophobia] is a tool to maintain [the pecking order]… How do you validate you're not a homosexual? It has power on you until the day you die! (Participant A)

It is possible for boys to list various terms of abuse and rank them according to how severe they consider them to be. When this was done, words like poofter were ranked as the most stigmatising and provocative. A further indication of the importance attached to homophobia is the frequency with which homophobic words are used. While the number of homophobic references that boys witnessed each day varies considerably, by mid secondary school all participants reported hearing words like poofter at least many times a day, and some reported hearing them over fifty times per day. Moreover, almost all references were confined to those comparatively short times when boys were together outside the classroom (Plummer 1999).

Homophobic labels are difficult to divest once they become attached to individuals, and homophobia makes it difficult for other boys to form alliances with them because they are discredited. This double bind is analogous to Goffman's well-known descriptions of stigma (Goffman 1963: 30). As a result, because homophobia is both marginalizing and can be invoked by marginalisation, homophobic marginalisation can be self-perpetuating – poofters get isolated and loners are poofters. A similar mechanism appears to be involved in inactivating 'circuit-breakers' that are ordinarily available to defuse harassment. Homophobia makes it difficult to defend a boy who is victimized, because supporting the target makes the supporter suspect too. In concert with the intractable demonisation of 'poofters' in peer culture, this mechanism might explain why homophobic attacks too often culminate in extreme violence – frequently much more than is required to kill the victim (Berrill 1994). Thus being subjected to homophobia at school can be deeply isolating and many boys are acutely aware of the potential for violence to escalate. They also have realistic fears that the odds are against them, because homophobic dynamics pitch loners against powerful groups. Nowhere is this felt more acutely than when rough team sports are involved. Descriptions of the school ground and the sports ground by boys who have been targeted often makes school sound more like prison than a safe haven (Rofes 1995).

> I reckon school is a really cruel place. I mean anybody that's slightly different… people will just take the piss out of them. And I'm sure it still happens. It must! A smart kid with glasses carrying around his books or reading a book always copped it. A fat kid, a poofter, a boy that was wanting to be with the girls copped it. (Participant Z)

Homophobia would be meaningless if males failed to be influenced by it. However, as we have seen, homophobia can be intense and intimidating and this leads boys to develop various strategies to manage and avoid it. This fear of homophobia – or 'homophobiaphobia' – appears to be deeply influential on boys and young men, possibly more so than homophobia itself (Plummer 1999). At the root of homophobiaphobia is an intense conditioning process, starting at school and extending over many years, when boys learn to use powerful homophobic conventions – and to evade them. The resulting aversion from homophobic stigma links into the complicated codes and the many layers of homophobic meaning, some of which are outlined above. The effect of this fear and its association with so many levels of meaning is that the influence of homophobia extends into almost every aspect of men's and boys' lives. How males styles their hair, how they dress, how they speak, their gait, their wrist action, their involvement in sports, the school subjects they choose, how they apply themselves in class, how obedient they are, whether they are loners, how freely they expresses their emotions, how they use their eyes around other males, are all subject to complex homophobic conventions. Moreover, the intensity of these processes and the tensions they generate leads to highly codified, sometimes ritualized, responses.

> I became aware of put down of gays, socially and within the family. I stopped playing piano. I stopped ballroom dancing at a very young age, cause I was frightened of, you know, being labeled gay. (Participant N)

The impact of homophobia

Homophobia has emerged as a complex phenomenon, which plays a fundamental role in reinforcing stereotypical masculinity and in patrolling a key male intragender divide between 'real men' and 'others'. In the process, it has become an inescapable conclusion that homophobia has a tremendous influence over all men – not just those who are gay. Indeed the insidious effects of homophobia seem to be so normalized that they are often inapparent until the analysis exposes them, after which they seem surprisingly obvious. This finding echoes Foucault's well-known formulation that power is only tolerable when it is masked and that its impact is 'proportional to its ability to conceal its own mechanisms' (Foucault 1990: 86). It also serves as a reminder that the study of homophobia is not synonymous with the study of homosexuality – as many people seem to assume. Such a study would largely end up being a rather incomplete 'victimology'. On the contrary, the study of homophobia is necessarily also the study of homophobes and how homophobia seems to be devoted to entrenching and reinforcing stereotypical masculinity – many aspects of which are extreme and dangerous.

For gay men, the burden of homophobia is heavy – rejection, isolation, attack, murder, internalized homophobia, low self-esteem and for some, self-destructive behaviors. Homophobia severely compromises the health of gay men, for example, delays in responding to HIV; 'watering-down' and 'sanitizing' HIV prevention education; impediments to quality health care due to prejudice; concentrating sexual risks in marginalized settings; the influence of self-esteem on young men's welfare and resilience; and undermining more 'enlightened' political responses, to name but a few examples (see Crimp D 1988, Goggin & Hee 1990, Berrill 1992, Plummer 1995).

However, it also has to be acknowledged that gay men (and lesbians) have engineered many positive outcomes in the face of homophobia, such as defiance, strength, independence, cohesion, collectively empowered health initiatives, community formation and gay culture (Aggleton 1987: 108).

Homophobia has extensive effects on males whatever their sexual orientation (Kimmel 1994, Plummer 1999). You will recall that powerful homophobic codes enter boys' repertoires during mid-primary school – prior to sexual maturity, prior to puberty, prior to forming their adult sexual identity and prior to having much, if any knowledge of what homosexuality is. You will also recall that homophobic accusations are often based on non-sexual 'surrogate markers' rather than evidence of sexual activity. Throughout adult life, homophobia continues to exert an influence over men in general. For example, aversion to things tainted by homophobia creates barriers and 'no go zones' – certain foods are considered suspect (not just 'fairy-bread'!), certain drinks are considered too 'poofy' (especially if they are low-alcohol or come with umbrellas!), safety precautions in the workplace are 'for fags', small cars and driving below the speed limit are for wimps and poofs, and so on. Homophobia comprehensively influences how men present themselves to others, their social networks and their education, career and life patterns. Moreover, in doing so, homophobia exerts pressures that enforce conformity, that restricts men and which limits their potential. For example, the ability to express certain emotions is restrained by homophobia –the loss of face involved in relinquishing control over one's emotions is deeply incriminating.

> I wanted to avoid everything that would attach me to that, because… it only had the most negative associations imaginable. So, I never said the word, I would never read anything to do with it...
> DP: Which word's that?
> You've already said it, the 'P' word [poofter]! (Participant O)

As well as restraining men's options, homophobia exerts its influence by pressuring men towards high-risk behaviors. For example, driving cars dangerously or being part of a gang can be very risky, but the reason why men don't disengage from such behaviors may well be because they can't risk 'losing face' with their peers if they back out. It is in this potential for 'loss of face' that homophobia exerts its powerful influence. Classic homophobic responses for such a scenario include: 'What are you?' or 'Why don't you fight, you fag?' Homophobia is deeply stigmatizing and men have been conditioned to think that the price is too high – to risk becoming known as a poofter or a faggot. The net effect is to reinforce pressures to pursue high-risk options rather than opting for safer, easier ways out. However, while masculinity is prestigious, there is little to be gained - and much to lose - from taking masculinity to its extreme. But when homophobia is taken into consideration, intractable 'hypermasculine' behaviors become a little easier to understand.

An agenda for the future
Analyzing homophobia from an intragender and developmental perspective raises a number of interesting issues. These issues pose important challenges for research into sexuality, gender and men's health and welfare. In the final paragraphs, I have chosen eight fields, which I think are particularly interesting and deserve priority.

1. The effect of homophobia on boys' education

Homophobia exerts a powerful influence over boys at school (Thorne 1993, Mac an Ghaill 1994). It plays an important role in bullying and harassment in peer groups (Rofes 1995, Plummer 1999). A homophobic disincentive for boys to aim for academic achievement was also identified by the present research, particularly in the middle school years. It is therefore likely that homophobia will have an influential effect on boys' education. To what extent does homophobia contribute to school bullying? What role do team sports play in promoting homophobia? What steps can be taken to make schools safer for children who are 'different', and better learning environments for boys in general? How far does homophobia impact on boys' educational standards? If high scholastic achievement is increasingly seen as a girls' domain, then what contribution does homophobia make to driving boys to physical pursuits and away from academic success?

2. Homophobia and youth suicide

Australia has experienced a growth in youth suicides over the last 25 years or so with young males being disproportionately affected (Primary Health Care Group, 1995). It has been suggested that young men who are gay (or who would have been if they had survived) are at particular risk (Remafedi, 1994). While it is difficult to understand how sexual orientation might contribute to youth suicide (a homophobic argument in itself), it is feasible that homophobia has an important role. Isolation is one of the few social factors that has been convincingly linked to suicide (Remafedi, 1994). It is difficult to imagine a more isolating experience than being subjected to sustained homophobic targeting at school, particularly when homophobia undermines opportunities to form alliances with peers, stifles role models, and leaves boys uncertain about how adults will react if they seek help. To what extent does homophobia lead to vulnerable boys being stigmatized, outcast and isolated - gay or otherwise? What contribution is homophobia making towards our modern epidemic of youth suicide?

3. Homophobia and identity

Boys learn homophobic conventions prior to puberty, prior to sexual maturity, prior to sexual identity formation and generally prior to knowing much, if anything about homosexuality or homosexuals. Moreover, homophobic terms generally lack explicit sexual connotations during the first few years of use (Plummer 1999). Nevertheless, during this early stage, homophobic terms are powerful, deeply negatively cathected, gender specific and meaningful. Because they come first, these early homophobic experiences presumably influence how boys come to terms with their emerging sexual identities (Troiden, 1993). Indeed, it may also be that by setting the terms of reference, homophobic conventions underwrite boys' initial understandings of sexual identity and may even make a substantial direct contribution to adult sexual identity formation. The question then becomes not whether, but to what extent does homophobia contribute to the creation of modern adult sexual identities, gay and straight?

4. The consequences of homophobia for gay men

Gay men are the definitive adult target for homophobia, and as such suffer a wide range of adverse consequences. Tomsen (1994, 1997) has shown that for the past 20

years or so, one quarter of all stranger murders in New South Wales had a homophobic basis even though gay men constitute a small proportion of the population. However, murder is only the tip of the iceberg. As a class, both gay men and lesbians are at increased risk for harassment and assault than the rest of the community (Sandroussi & Thompson 1995). There are extensive indirect and internalized consequences of homophobia too (Plummer 1999). The extensive impacts of homophobia on the lives, health and welfare of gay men need to be thoroughly researched and better strategies need to be developed to address them.

5. The role of homophobia in shaping the AIDS epidemic
Homophobia has influenced the AIDS epidemic in countless ways (see Crimp 1988, Goggin & Hee 1990; Altman 1992, Ballard 1992). Yet there remains a notable lack of detailed research into the impact of homophobia on HIV patterns, social responses, public policy, prevention or care. This suspicious deficiency is a weakness of our HIV social research response, which must be redressed.

6. Homophobia and the impact of sexual assault on men.
A key feature of sexual assault on men is its same-sex nature. This adds an important dimension to male-female sexual assault issues. In my experience this dimension is greatly underestimated and that male sexual assault is deeply stigmatized and seriously under-reported. Frequent reactions following sexual assault include "What did he see in me?", "Did I look gay?", "Will this turn me gay?", "Why did I get an erection?". All of these concerns have an implicit homophobic subtext – that the homosexual nature and possible consequences of the assault are bad. The entrenched homophobic conditioning that most boys experience in the school ground may well empower same-sex sexual assault. Further studies are needed on the role of homophobia as a weapon in male sexual assault; on the therapeutic implications of homophobia following an assault; and to what extent prevalent homophobic attitudes contribute to the impact of sexual assault and the ongoing difficulties faced by the person who was assaulted.

7. Homophobia and men's health and welfare in general
Homophobia impacts on the lives of men in multiple ways (Kimmel 1994, Connell 1995, Plummer 1999). It stigmatizes certain male behaviors and life patterns and renders them unpalatable - even when they offer safer, healthier alternatives. Moreover, while masculinity is prestigious; being too 'masculine' is risky. Homophobia acts to counterbalance those risks and may well underwrite hypermasculine, sometimes dangerous, antisocial behaviors as a reaction against homophobic stigma. Is homophobia a 'missing link' at the basis of men's socially constructed health and welfare issues? The impact of homophobia on the behavior, risk-taking and life-patterns of men irrespective of their sexual orientation needs to be systematically detailed and mapped so that appropriate men's health strategies can be developed.

8. The nature and impact of homophobia on women.
The present project found indications that homophobic dynamics against women and between women differ significantly from those involving men, presumably because of the power differentials involved (Plummer 1999: 158-159). Perhaps these differences are not so surprising, but they indicate that it would be inappropriate to conflate male

and female homophobia into a single explanatory framework. Parallel (as opposed to mirror image) studies are required to elucidate the developmental basis for homophobia directed at women. Homophobia is an important issue for lesbians and such studies would provide greater insights into its significance and impact and what interventions might be effective.

Conclusion

This paper revisits a phenomenon commonly called homophobia. By shifting the analytical focus onto homophobia's developmental origins, a more comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of homophobia emerges. It appears that homophobia originates from a division between males (an intragender division), which ultimately has the effect of separating the 'men' from the 'boys'. It does this by demonizing non-conformists who 'betray' or who fail to 'measure up' to collectively authorized standards of masculinity. This theme persists as a subtext of homophobia throughout adulthood. Some of the findings presented here expose limitations to those models which frame homophobia as an anti-gay bias, heterosexism or as a variant of misogyny, each of which is only partially explanatory. However, taken from the perspective of boyhood taboos against intragender transgression – of failing to live up to peer-based expectations – heterosexist, anti-gay and gender transgression models can be accommodated, but homophobic taboos against delayed maturation and peer-group betrayal can also be accounted for. From this vantage point, the explanatory framework shifts from a preoccupation with the involvement of gay men in homophobia (which inevitably leads to victim blaming) and onto the mechanisms involved in generating and empowering homophobia and the vested interests of male peer-based structures (Sedgewick 1985: 88). No longer is it possible to dismiss homophobia as a peripheral phenomenon, which 'only' affects homosexuals - a homophobic perspective which entrenches homophobia, by trivializing, marginalizing and stigmatizing it. Homophobia emerges from the twilight and is revealed as having powerful, extensive and far-reaching impact, with central importance to the health and welfare of all men. It is precisely the association between men's power and homophobic stigma, which makes homophobia resilient and intractable and difficult to address.

Table 1. Characteristics targeted and meanings associated with homophobic terms.

- Acting like a baby, crying, being dependent
- Being physically incompetent, immature or weak
- Being gentle, a pacifist and lacking courage
- Being soft, emotional, affectionate or showing tenderness
- Being too neat or tidy
- Being studious, academic, or favored by teachers
- Being special, privileged, aloof or elitist
- Being unmasculine
- Being 'different'
- Not belonging, not conforming to peer-group culture or expectations
- Not being successful in, not participating in, or rejecting team sports
- Betraying peer group solidarity (compulsory homosociality)
- Being 'feminine' or acting like a girl
- Associating too closely with girls in primary school
- Not associating closely enough with girls in secondary school
- Not being publicly heterosexual (compulsory heterosexuality)
- Being homosexual

Table 2. Recommendations for schools

Guarantee a safe environment
> Actively identify safety zones
> Patrol them and keep them open
> Actively protect targets
> Provide circuit breakers

Neutralize danger zones
> Actively identify danger zones
> Intensify patrolling of danger zones especially at risky times
> Pay special attention to play areas, team sports, change-rooms, boarding house, camp, recess, transit, school bus, isolated locations

Actively advocate for and support different children
> Affirm difference
> Provide positive role models
> Provide opportunities to network and seek support

Name and explicitly reject homophobia
> Monitor and intervene in homophobia
> Prohibit staff exploiting homophobia either directly or indirectly

Accept that the process is continual and requires strategy and effort
> Continual in-group / out-cast dynamics will need regulating

Be careful to differentiate between rejection of homophobia and rejection of homosexuality
> Be clear that your strategies are because homophobia is unacceptable, not because homosexuality is wrong

Be careful to differentiate between peer groups, alienated and rival groups and loners
> Peer groups emulate and enforce orthodox masculinity
> Alienated groups represent competing masculinities
> Loners represent the 'other' are targeted by all the above groups

Consider replacing sex education with misogyny and homophobia education
> Provide a safe environment in which boys can discover their identity
> Consider abandoning sex education unless it can (i) deconstruct masculinity, homophobia and misogyny (ii) be sex positive (iii) provide relationship skills and (iv) emphasize physical, emotional and sexual safety

Be aware of the growing likelihood of legal action if you fail to respond appropriately or adequately

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