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13 Bent Straights Diversity and Flux Among Heterosexual Men

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INTRODUCTION

New formations of sexuality are emerging among young heterosexual men. There are signs of diversity, and flux, in the sexual cultures of such males, shaped by wider shifts in gender and sexual relations. This chapter maps some of the clearest examples of diversity and flux among them, as part of a wider project on young men's sexual and social relations with women.

Overview of This Research

The wider project in which I am engaged is a critical analysis of the sexual cultures of young heterosexual men. My primary aim is to document the cultural understandings and social relations, which shape the sexual practices and involvements of such males aged 18 to 24, drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 90 of them from a variety of backgrounds and settings. The term "sexual cultures" embodies a recognition of the cultural and collective constitution of sexual relations, and refers to clusters of norms, beliefs, and practices associated with particular settings, contexts, or communities. The project is oriented toward improving young men's, and young women's, sexual and reproductive health.

Mapping: What We Know so Far

From a now substantial scholarship, we know that certain forms of gender and sexuality are dominant (culturally celebrated and socially sanctioned) in any context, while others are stigmatized, silenced, or punished. Constructions of gender and sexuality vary among young heterosexual men in different cultures and countries. At the same time, there are themes that appear again and again in diverse contexts. I outline them before focusing on questions of diversity and change. Very briefly, some aspects of dominant constructions of masculinity and heterosexuality identified in the literature include:

- The notion of male sexuality as an uncontrollable or barely controllable force (Kippax, Crawford, & Waldby, 1994, p. 5318; Richardson, 1997, p. 161; Wilton, 1997, p. 34);
- Women's sexuality as passive, and an absence of the naming of girls' and women's sexual desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement (Fine, 1993, p. 35);
- The organization of heterosexual sex around men's sexual needs and men's sexual pleasure, including the definition of "real" sex as penis-in-vagina intercourse (Foreman, 1998, p. 22; Wight, 1994; Wilton, 1997, p. 34);
- The homosocial policing of young men's sexual and social relations with women, including patterns of male-male competition, surveillance, and discipline (Flood, in press; Holland, Ramazanoglu & Sharpe, 1994, p. 14), associations between sexual experience, and masculine status (Wilton, 1997, p. 34), and so on;
- Women as the gatekeepers and guardians of sexual safety and health, with responsibility for both their own and men's sexual behavior (Richardson, 1997, p. 161; Wilton, 1997), while masculinity is associated with risk-taking and constructed as stoic, brave, and aggressive (Primary Health Care Group, 1996, pp. 13-14);
- Male emotional insensitivity (Doyle, 1989, pp. 148-160), unequal divisions of emotional labor in heterosexual relationships and a reliance on women's emotional work (Strazdins & Broom, 2004), and feminine investment in discourses of "love" and "romance" (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Rosenthal, Gifford, & Moore, 1998);
- Heterosexual male ambivalence toward girls or women: On the one hand, boys may show contempt for femaleness and the stereotypical qualities of femininity, and conflate male femininity and homosexuality, and on the other hand, they also treat girls as objects of sexual desire, fascination, and fixation (Mac an Ghail, 1994, pp. 102, 164);
- Sexual control and knowledge as the property of men, based on cultural equations of masculinity, activity, and knowledge on one hand, and femininity, passivity, and innocence on the other (Waldby, Kippax, & Crawford, 1993, p. 255);
- A sexual double standard and the policing of female sexual reputation (Hillier, Harrison, & Warr, 1998, p. 26; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1996, p. 242; Kitinger, 1995; Stewart, 1999);
- Norms, particularly among a minority of young men, in which sexual violence is seen as legitimate or desirable (National Crime Prevention, 2001, pp. 64-70), victims are blamed, and consent is ignored or violated;
- Homophobia and heterosexism: definitions of masculinity against or in opposition to homosexuality (as well as femininity) (Connell, 1995, p. 78; Flood, 1997; Kinsman, 1987), a homophobic policing of boys'

and men's performances of gender, and the daily enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality. (Rich, 1980)

There is evidence that such constructions have shifted over the past several decades. My own PhD research documented a number of configurations of sociosexual meaning and practice among young heterosexual men, which are at odds with the depictions of masculinity and masculine sexuality in much of the literature (Flood, 2003b).

DIVERSITY

There has been a tendency in some queer and lesbian feminist writing to paint heterosexual social and sexual relations as homogenous and indeed monotonous, in contrast to the diversity and vibrancy of nonheterosexual life. However, given the widespread recognition of sexual diversity, it is problematic to assume that heterosexual sexual cultures, whether in the West or elsewhere, are characterized by homogenous sexual subjectivities and relations (Herdt, 1999, p. 100).

There are good reasons to think that heterosexual sexual cultures are both heterogeneous and dynamic. If a sexual culture is defined in terms of shared sexual conduct and sociosexual norms, then it is likely that there are multiple heterosexual sexual cultures based on divergent sexual practices and understandings, shaped by forms of social differentiation, institutional locations, and so on.

Specifically, we are likely to see forms of diversity associated with axes of social differentiation, diverse peer cultures, particular settings and contexts, and nonmainstream sexual relations and communities.

Axes of Social Differentiation and Sexual Practice

Multiple forms of social differentiation and categorization, such as class, race, and ethnicity, are likely to structure young men's social and sexual relations. In the first instance, these axes of difference are related to varying patterns of sexual activity, as simple demographic data attest. Among youths, the average age of first intercourse varies with class, education, culture, and ethnicity (Roker & Coleman, 1998, p. 7). Female students from non-English-speaking backgrounds in Australia are less likely to be sexually active than their Anglo counterparts (Lindsay, Smith, & Rosenthal, 1997, p. 26). Young people who adhere to religious values, whatever the religion, also are less likely to be sexually active (Moore & Rosenthal, 1998, p. 46). Those in rural locations are more likely to be sexually active than urban youth, and this is especially so for women (Lindsay et al., 1997, p. 26). Finally, homeless youth practice higher levels of risky sexual behavior and do so with more partners (Hillier, Matthews, & Dempsey, 1997).

Multiple and Diverse Peer Cultures among Boys and Young Men

Research among boys and young men in schools documents the existence of multiple and contradictory masculinities and male peer groups with different masculine subjectivities and practices. British and Australian research has revealed diverse subcultures and identities among boys in schools (Connell, 1989, 1993, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1996; Martino, 1999; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Scottish research found that young men in male-only peer groups espoused norms of a predatory male sexuality and sexual double standard, while in mixed-sex groups these were largely absent, and the men expressed ideals of companionate relationships (Wight, 1996). Mac an Ghaill (2000, p. 205) shows that while some young men cultivate females' attraction through their consumption of fashionable clothes, hairstyles, and music, as well as display their competence at forming heterosexual relationships, other young men celebrate a sexual prowess based instead on "extreme perversity, violent misogyny, and a racialized sexuality."

There are likely to be further diversities in the sexual relations of youth cultures associated with particular bodies of music, fashion, and cultural consumption, from goth (Wilkins, 2004) and skater scenes, to punk and straight edge (Haenfler, 2004), to rural Bachelors' and Spinsters' Balls.

Sexual Cultures Associated with Particular Sports, Workplaces, or Social Circles

Among young heterosexual men, local sexual cultures may be constituted through collective participation in particular sports, workplaces, or social circles. For example, the 2004 allegations of sexual assault by professional rugby league and AFL players suggested that at least some of them participate in a local sexual culture defined by homosocial bonding and tight group loyalties, heavy drinking, and participation in group sex.

Australian research on gay and homosexually active men has begun to pay attention to the ways in which ethnic or cultural identity, family, class, and community construct and in turn are constructed by sexuality and a gay community (Connell, Davis, & Dowsett, 1993; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998). It is likely that class, and the sexual cultures of particular workplaces, also shape young heterosexual men's sexual relations. For example, a national survey of over 2,500 male TAFE apprentices in the occupational streams of hairdressing, automotive studies, and commercial cookery found systematic differences in sexual practices, use of condoms, and attitudes toward HIV, depending on these males' vocational choices (Grunseit & Kippax, 1996). Men in the traditionally masculine stream of automotive studies were less likely than those in commercial cookery to have used condoms at last intercourse and had more negative attitudes toward them.

Another dimension of sexual diversity among young heterosexual men concerns their participation in nonmainstream sexual relations, milieux, or communities, such as swinging, sadomasochism, and so on.

Nonmainstream Sexual Relations and Communities: Swingers, S&M, and So On

"Swinging" refers to organized recreational sex among mixed-sex couples, premised on emotional monogamy and physical nonmonogamy (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Swinging represents perhaps the only heterosexual equivalent to gay male "beats" and sex-on-premises venues. Overlapping with swinging are communities and sexual relations centered on polyamory, "the love of many people at once" (Society for Human Sexuality, n.d.), and those centered on BDSM (bondage and discipline and/or sadomasochism): sexual interests or practices involving the use of restraint and/or mock or real punishment or power-based role playing (Ellard, Richters, & Newman, 2004, p. iii).

An Australian national survey of 19,307 people aged 16 to 59 years found that among respondents with a sexual partner in the last year, 2% of men and 1.4% of women had engaged in BDSM or DS in the last year, and 4% of men and 3.7% of women had been involved in role playing or dressing up (Richters, Grulich, de Visser, Smith, & Rissel, 2003, p. 185). Group sex in the last year was reported by 2.3% of men and 0.6% of women (Richters et al., 2003, p. 185). Such rates of participation among the general population are considerably lower than those among particular subpopulations, such as men who have sex with men. While only small numbers of heterosexual men and women participate in such sexual relations, this is another dimension to potential diversity among young males.

FLUX: SHIFTS IN HETEROSEXUAL MEN'S SEXUAL CULTURES

Heterosexual Sexual Cultures also Dynamic

Heterosexual sexual cultures also are dynamic. They are influenced by, and themselves impact, other social changes. There is evidence of change in both young men's and women's sexual practice and in the social and cultural factors that are their context.

Shifts in Children's and Young People's Sexual Lives

We know that there have been at least four shifts in young people's sexual lives over the last few decades. First, children in Western countries are now starting puberty and adolescence earlier and staying in it for longer than ever before. The average age of puberty is now 10 to 10-1/2 for girls, and

11–1/2 to 12 for boys (Roker & Coleman, 1998, pp. 4–5). Second, the average age of first intercourse has declined. In Australia, one third of students in Year 10 and just over half of those in Year 12 have had vaginal intercourse, with steady increases since 1997 and 1992 (Smith, Agius, Dyson, Mitchell, & Pitts, 2003, p. 2), and higher percentages have experienced passionate kissing and sexual touching. Third, there has been a generational change in sexual “styles.” Younger people engage in a significantly wider variety of sexual behaviors than older people, including oral sex and heterosexual anal intercourse (Moore & Rosenthal, 1998, pp. 47–48). Fourth, youths now have a greater number of sexual partners, and over a lifetime will have substantially more of them than did their parents (Moore & Rosenthal, 1998, p. 50). However, this is not a simple story of steady increases in Australian youths’ sexual activity over time. The numbers of sexual partners reported by Year 12 students has declined over the past decade, although they have increased among those in Year 10 (Smith et al., 2003, p. 35).

Gender Convergence—Closing the Sexual Gap

There are various signs of a convergence in men’s and women’s sexual and intimate practices and understandings. A series of gender differences have been documented in relation to sexuality, reflecting intersecting constructions of gender and sexuality. In brief, men think about sex more often than women, are more likely to fantasize when masturbating (and their fantasies are more likely to involve sex with strangers, often more than one at a time, involving a variety of sexual acts), are more intercourse-focused, place less value on sex with emotional commitment, have a greater interest in one-night stands and sexual infidelity, and experience more pleasure during sex (Kimmel, 2000, pp. 223–227). Males also are significantly more likely than females to view pornography frequently and to be sexually aroused by, and have favorable attitudes toward it (Lo & Wei, 2002, p. 16; Walsh, 1999, p. 779).

However, such gender gaps are closing in some Western countries. For example, there is less cultural emphasis on the need for women to preserve their virginity until marriage. There has been some gender convergence in rates and motivations for masturbation, the proportions who have had sex, ages of first intercourse, numbers of sexual partners, and interest in sexual variety (Kimmel, 2000, pp. 227–232). A large Australian survey finds that men’s and women’s attitudes toward a range of sexuality-related topics are similar, although there are substantial differences with regard to sexual explicitness in films and sex between men (but not between women; Richters & Rissel, 2005, pp. 29–33).

Aspects of this convergence represent the movement of women’s sexualities closer to men’s, rather than the reverse (Kimmel, 2000, p. 232). At the same time, there are some signs of shift among males toward more traditionally feminine forms of sexual and intimate engagement. For example, while men

traditionally are said to be emotionally constipated and hostile to discourses of love and romance, some young men in my PhD research emphasized their investments in narratives of trust, intimacy, and monogamy. They were ambivalent about “love,” but often relied on “trust” as their primary strategy in protecting themselves against sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Other qualitative research, for example in the United Kingdom, has explored boys’ investments in verbal exchanges of romantic love (Redman, 2001), while in an American study among heterosexual men, narratives of sexual conquest and a sexual double standard sat alongside those of romance and sexual intimacy (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). Similarly, Australian research has noted a “gender convergence” in young people’s reasons for having sex, with “love, caring and affection” the main motives (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). As Seal and Ehrhardt (2003, p. 314) suggest, it may be that “men’s interpersonal scripts for heterosexual courtship, romantic, and sexual interactions are in a state of transition” (2003, p. 314).

At the same time, there are still important gender differences and inequalities, for example, in relation to pleasure in sex. A recent national survey of 20,000 people aged 16 to 59 years in Australia found that 90% of men, and 79% of women, report that the sex in their regular relationship is “very” or “extremely” pleasurable (Richters & Rissel, 2005, p. 62). Five percent of females say that the sex is slightly or not at all pleasurable, compared to 1% of males. More than a quarter of women (27%) said that they did not find sex pleasurable (as did 6% of men), suggesting that many females are having sex that they do not like or really want (Richters & Rissel, 2005, p. 90). Perhaps the starkest gender difference is in relation to forced sex. One in five Australian women (21%) has been forced or frightened into doing something sexually that they did not want to do (96). The same is true of one in twenty men (5%; Richters & Rissel, 2005, p. 96).

There have been profound changes in the wider social forces, which may shape sexual cultures among young men and women. Focusing on young heterosexual males, there are at least six developments in Australia with implications for their sexual relations: changes in family structure and patterns of fertility and childrearing, new technologies used to mediate and foster sexual relations and communities, the growing acceptance of norms of gender equality, cultural “pornographication,” an increased assertion of young female sexual desire and agency, and new discourses of “queer” and “metrosexual” masculinities.

Changes in Family Structure and Patterns of Fertility and Childrearing

Shifts in both family structure and the circumstances and timing of fertility have transformed the contexts for young men’s sexual and social relations with women. Overall rates of marriage have declined, nonmarital cohabitation has increased, and divorces have risen. Both females and males are becoming parents at progressively older ages, having fewer children in

total, and more of them outside marriage (Flood, 2003a, pp. 5–11). In addition, mothers' labor force participation has increased, offspring depend on their parents to a greater extent and live with them for longer, and there is increased unemployment and labor mobility and insecurity (Sanson & Lewis, 2001, p. 4; Weston, Stanton, & Soriano, 2001).

Such changes mean that young men (and young women) are experiencing a much longer period of sexual experimentation and partner change after the initiation of sexual activity and prior to cohabitation, marriage, and parenting, and the circumstances of such involvements themselves are increasingly diverse and fluid.

Shifts in family structure have been accompanied by a growing emphasis among fathers on their role as providers of emotional support to their children (Russell et al., 1999, pp. 32–33). However, the culture of fatherhood has changed much faster than the conduct in Australia. Despite the proliferation of imagery and rhetoric centered on the nurturing father, there has been virtually no change in the gender division of child care in couple households over the year 1986 to 1997 (Baxter, 2002, pp. 409–410). Many young men continue to expect that such responsibility will be primarily that of their partners (National Crime Prevention, 2001, p. 74; Singleton & Maher, 2004; White, 2003). In a survey of Australian youth aged 12–20, 25% of males but only 10% of females agreed that “Women should be responsible for raising children and doing housework” (National Crime Prevention, 2001, p. 74).

The Development of Internet Media and Internet-based Relations and Communities

There have also been changes in the means through which sexual interactions and relations are carried out and negotiated. The Internet is facilitating new possibilities for these activities and enabling emergent sexual communities to cohere. We know very little about what role Internet chat, online communities, and other technologies and digital contexts may be playing in shaping new forms of such interaction.

In addition, other technologies such as the mobile phone now are used by young people for social and sexual interaction.

The Growing Acceptance of Norms of Gender Equality

There also have been shifts in the cultural norms that structure young men's involvement in sexual relations. One significant example is the growing acceptance of gender equality, in the wake and presence of feminism and other social changes.

There is no denying that young men are less supportive of gender equality than young women. In a recent Australian survey of 5,000 young people aged 12 through 20, 37% of young males agreed that “Men should take

control in relationships and be head of the household,” compared to 12% of young females (National Crime Prevention, 2001, p. 74). At the same time, boys and young men are likely to have better attitudes toward gender equality than older generations of males, at least if patterns in Australia follow those documented in the United States.

Survey data from the United States show that both women's and men's attitudes toward gender equality have improved over the past 30 years, although the latter's have changed more slowly, and, as a result, the gap between females' and males' outlooks attitudes has widened (Ciabattari, 2001, pp. 574–575). Improvement in men's views reflects two processes. First, as individual males' attitudes improve, those of cohorts of men also change positively over time. Second, younger generations of men have less conservative positions than older ones. Similar processes are likely in Australia.

Significant pockets of resistance remain among boys and young men to gender equality, just as they do among older males (Ciabattari, 2001, p. 576). There has been more progress on some issues such as women's participation in paid work than on others such as interpersonal violence or domestic inequalities.

A Sexualized Cultural Environment: Pornographication and “Raunch Culture”

Today's young people are growing up in a cultural environment that is vastly different from that experienced by their parents and grandparents as youth. Late 20th-century Western cultures saw a proliferation of sexual imagery and an explosion of popular sexual debate (Levine, 2002, p. 4). Contemporary youth experience levels of “sexualization” in society higher than ever before, in the form of sexualized media representations and everyday interactions (Goldman, 2000, p. 11). Thus has been an increased sexualization or “pornographication” of mainstream media and culture (McNair, 1996, p. 23). There is greater testing and blurring of boundaries between pornography and mainstream media and art, an adoption of the language and visual codes of pornography, and endless “sex talk” in popular culture (Attwood, 2002, p. 98; Levy, 2005, pp. 1–3, 17–28).

Such a process brings both positives and pitfalls. While it facilitates sexual knowledge and diversity, it also intensifies exposure to forms of sexualized content, which some argue encourage sexism or violence.

For antipornography feminist writers, pornography “sexualizes and normalizes inequalities” and “makes violence sexy” (Russell, 1993; Russo, 1998, p. 18). What is objectionable is not pornography's sexual explicitness, but its abusive, hierarchical, objectifying, and degrading portrayal of females and female sexuality (Jensen & Dines, 1998, pp. 65–66; MacKinnon, 1994, p. 87). Other feminist and nonfeminist authors argue that there is great diversity in pornographic imagery and that the vast range of sexual images should not be characterized solely in terms of violence

against women (Snitow, 1988, p. 14). They also posit that male and female viewers interpret representations in complex, selective, and ambiguous ways (Strossen, 1995, pp. 145–154); that diverse meanings may be attributed to the same scenes and sexual acts; that pornography can have positive effects and meanings; and that the usual criticisms of pornography cannot be applied simply to the gay male version of it (Thomas, 2000, pp. 63–64). Nevertheless, in most mass-marketed heterosexual pornography, “sex is divorced from intimacy, loving affection, and human connection; all women are constantly available for sex and have insatiable sexual appetites; and all women are sexually satisfied by whatever the men in the film do” (Jensen & Dines, 1998, p. 72). Heterosexual pornography’s “narrative of female nymphomania and male sexual prowess” (Jensen & Dines, 1999, pp. 77–78) does not cater to all men’s desires, nor are its appeals exclusive to males, but it works in a symbiotic relationship with common constructions of masculine heterosexual sexuality.

At the same time, one can also find very different texts about heterosexual men at least at the outer reaches of the pornographic universe. For example, the sex instruction video *Bend Over Boyfriend* teaches women how to give their male partners anal pleasure, in particular through anal intercourse with strap-ons or dildos (Taormino, 2000). Such a text violates, literally, a common principle of masculine heterosexuality: A man should only be the penetrator, never the penetratee.

Raunch Culture

Levy (2005) describes aspects of the pornographication of culture in terms of the rise of “raunch culture.” In it, women make sex objects of themselves and others, there is a cultural expectation that women will exhibit their bodies, female empowerment is signaled only by overt and public sexuality, and sexuality itself is recognizable in the codes of pornography and prostitution (Levy, 2005, p. 26).

Speculating on what this might mean for young heterosexual men, this pornographication invites them into sexual interactions modeled on those enacted by the male clients of pornography and prostitution, such that they engage with women only as objects, as breasts and buttocks, and value them only for their conformity to narrow codes of sexual availability.

An Increased Assertion of Young Female Sexual Desire and Agency

Alongside the sexualization of popular culture, there are also signs of a growing assertion of sexual desire and agency by young women. Qualitative research in Australia documents that some young females challenge the imperatives of heterosexual femininity by divorcing sex from love; expressing sexual desire and agency; making lusty demands for sexual pleasure; and pursuing one-night stands, casual sex, older male partners,

and nonmonogamous relationships (Stewart, Mischewski, & Smith, 2000, pp. 413–416).

Such practices are an important challenge to dominant norms of female sexual passivity and propriety. They may also interact with normative shifts among heterosexual men. In an American study among 100 heterosexual males, largely blue-collar and African-American, there was growing acceptance of female-initiated courtship, and of female-initiated sex, at least within steady loving relationships (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). However, narratives of female desire and sexuality remain constrained by the policing and inequalities of the sexual double standard and an ethic of female sexual servicing. For example, young women may feel sexually agentic enough to perform oral sex on young men, but this may reflect interpersonal and social pressure as much as it does personal desire, and they rarely receive oral sex in return. Turning this around, young heterosexual males may benefit sexually from young females’ participation in raunch culture, but experience little obligation to adopt more equitable divisions of sexual pleasure.

New Discourses of “Queer” and “Metrosexual” Masculinities

I conclude by exploring perhaps the most visible aspect of new formations of male heterosexuality, “queer” and “metrosexual” masculinities.

New formations of sexuality are emerging among heterosexual men, informed by constructions of “queer” and “metrosexual” masculinities and other alternatives. Some straight men express alliance with gay men or question the binary of heterosexual and homosexual, or proclaim themselves to be “wusses” and “sissies,” or take up egalitarian roles in their heterosexual sexual relations, or adopt a feminized preoccupation with personal grooming. Such developments signal a weakening of longstanding constructions of heterosexual masculinity.

The “metrosexual” was defined by *The New York Times* as “a straight urban man willing to embrace his feminine side.” While such “embracing of femininity” might have heralded men’s radical critique of gender divisions, this potential was quickly coopted by commercial imperatives. Metrosexuality has come to signify merely a commitment to personal grooming and cosmetics. Clothing and lifestyle companies have moved to create and capture this new market of men interested in such traditionally feminine products. The feminization of male tastes can mean that men become what women once were expected to be: vain, shallow, and status-conscious. This “New Man’s” sensitivity is transformed into consumerism, creating an ideal subjectivity for the marketplace, a narcissistic and receptive consumer (McMahon, 1998, p. 155, citing Ehrenreich).

Popular culture too shows instances of either the blurring of hetero/homo boundaries among men or their comic transgression. In the television program “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” it is gay males who have the

cultural and personal capital with which to teach heterosexual men how to be attractive to women. In "Playing It Straight," a woman chooses a man from among 14 contestants, all acting straight but some of whom in fact are gay (Abernethy, 2004). In promoting the program, the Fox website showed a Gay-O-Meter with a needle flashing back and forth between "Breeder," "Metrosexual," "Sensitive," "Questionable," "Effeminate," and "Flaming" (Brioux, 2004). Take another Fox program, "Seriously, Dude, I'm Gay," in which two straight men live "the gay lifestyle" for a week, completing daily challenges, which test their ability to pass for gay, and then standing before a panel of gay judges to convince them of their gayness and thus win \$50,000.¹

Perhaps a more substantial challenge to homophobic constructions of heterosexual masculinity is represented by those straight men who draw on gay culture or who "act gay." I am thinking of those males described by some as "queer heterosexuals," "straight queers," or "straight with a twist" (Curiel, 2001), "straight fairies" who are "adamantly hetero but seemingly gay" in terms of their appearance, interests, and mannerisms (Lloyd, 2004). Such men are not merely "allies," "antihomophobic," or "gay-friendly," but attracted to and comfortable in queer culture and indeed often mistaken for gay. There is at least a perception that straight men increasingly are adopting the styles, clothing, and bodies first popularized by gay men, and the time lag between gay innovation and straight appropriation is shortening (Colman, 2005). Some heterosexual men are sporting looks that until recently might have been read as gay (and probably often still are by some). These males may be indifferent to having their sexual orientation misread (Colman, 2005), and this certainly indicates their distance from the powerful and defensive hostility traditionally offered by heterosexual men in response to such perceptions.

This gay-friendly straightness points to the weakening of heterosexual men's traditional hostility toward male homosexuality and a blurring of the boundaries between gay and straight. It reflects the growing visibility, strength, and cultural cachet of gay and lesbian culture, to which young heterosexual men have responded variously with hostility, interest, or participation. At the same time, notions such as "queer straights" have been criticized as akin to men calling themselves feminists or middle-class white people appropriating black street culture (Curiel, 2001).

CONCLUSION

I hope that I have left you with some sense of the significant forms of diversity, and change, evident among young heterosexual men. Young males' sexual practices and relations are heterogeneous, shaped by local contexts, peer cultures, and multiple axes of social differentiation. Their sexual relations are in a state of flux, as sexual practices, the intimate relations within

which these take place and the narratives, discourses, and cultural formations that give them meaning all shift. I have noted a number of ways in which those of us with a more activist bent might see "progress": increasing norms of gender equality, assertions of female agency, and destabilizations of rigidly heterosexual and masculine identities. At the same time, as I also have noted, many heterosexual men's social and sexual relations with women continue to be organized by gendered power centered on male privilege, and some new cultural formations do little to undermine these. It is an open question as to what kind of movement we will see next.

NOTES

1. "Fox's new reality special: Straight men convince everyone they're gay. . . ." *The Empty Closet*, June 3, 2004. New York: Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley. <http://ec.gayalliance.org/articles/000345.shtml> (accessed September 9, 2004).

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