



'Camping it Up to Make Them Laugh?' Gay Men Teaching in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT *This paper describes a number of ways in which a small group of gay higher educators draw upon their sexuality in their teaching. It considers three main themes (teaching from the outside; teaching as performance; and teaching as a (gay) person) to illuminate a discussion of how sexuality and teaching can be brought into productive relation. Whilst not wanting to imply a monolithic view of gay sexual identity and its relationship with teaching, the paper explores how the approaches to teaching described disrupt dominant pedagogies and the masculinities which underpin them. The paper concludes by inviting research into the ways in which heterosexual men use their sexuality positively in teaching and learning situations in higher education.*

Introduction

We know very little about gay higher educators. Very few studies have explored gay men's experiences of higher education and/or considered their approaches to teaching. One notable exception is Crew's study *The Gay Academic* (Crew, 1978), which was ground-breaking in its time for addressing a subject deemed 'controversial'. However, whilst with hindsight this study can be criticised for its narrow assimilationist perspective which merely encouraged gay academics to conform to the existing culture, assumptions and practices of higher education, few subsequent studies have been undertaken and these have been carried out mainly in the USA (for example, McNaron, 1997; Tierney, 1997). In the UK it is interesting to note that whilst gay men in other areas of public and professional life appear to becoming more 'visible' and 'out' about their sexuality (for example, the gay men now 'out' or 'outed' in the New Labour Government), there remains a curious silence and invisibility surrounding gay men in higher education. Despite calls from New Labour for an *inclusive* higher education to help shape a more *inclusive* society (see DfEE, 1998, p. 11), there is a danger that silence and invisibility will do little to challenge popular prejudices about alternative sexualities. For example, within the context of higher education, gay teachers may be seen as predatorial and conscripting of young, 'impressionable' male students. Their contributions to work may be

under-valued and their promotion prospects may be undermined by the hidden prejudices of senior managers [Association of University Teachers (AUT) 1998]. It is clear that we need more research into the actual experiences of gay teachers in higher education which identifies the contributions they make to their institutions. It is important that this research questions dominant assimilationist and heterosexist frameworks for understanding gay teachers' experiences in higher education, and their approaches to teaching and learning.

A Research Study

In January 1997, I began a study of gay teachers in higher education as part of a broader interest in masculinity. I wanted to contest the silence and invisibility of gay men in higher education, and to find out whether they are able to free themselves from the ideological binds of dominant, 'hegemonic' masculinity; that is a particular view of what it means to be a man which particular groups identify with and manage to sustain as a leading and authoritative definition (see Connell, 1995, p. 77). I chose to base the research study on interviews because I wanted to provide a relatively safe space within which gay men felt able to explore their experiences of higher education and their approaches to teaching. I decided not to use observational methods since these may have attracted attention to the participants and allowed their sexuality to be used against them by others (Taylor, 1986).

Between June 1997 and February 1998, I interviewed 13 men between the ages of 28 and 60 years old. Most described themselves as middle-class and British, three adding that they came from working-class backgrounds. Two are currently on 3-year contracts, the rest are permanent. All but one are full-time and three are senior lecturers. They have been teaching in higher education between 2 and 34 years, and most work in 'old' universities. They teach across a range of disciplines (such as law, biomedical sciences, education, English, modern languages, drama and continuing education) and work in a variety of locations (within Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland). Whilst I would not seek to claim that this group is simply representative of all gay men in higher education, there is clearly a wide range of experience and variety included within it. Although the scope of the study did not allow me to interview a larger group of men, I would argue that in many respects the group considered here may well be reasonably 'typical' of gay higher educators who work in 'old' universities.

In a previous paper, I wrote about how this group of gay men are experiencing a rapidly changing higher education—one that is increasingly being 'driven' by the market and 'guided' by managerialist values. I also provide further details about the approach to interviewing adopted in the study, its exclusions and methodological assumptions (Skelton, 1998a). In this paper, I want to focus on the different ways in which the men draw upon their sexuality in their teaching and what can be learned from this by the heterosexual majority. In doing this, I am wanting to suggest that teaching does not rely purely on psychological models, and/or predetermined competencies and skills for its realisation. Rather, teaching is also informed

by who one is as a person (Nias, 1985; Skelton, 1990), and how one negotiates questions of gender, sexuality and identity.

Sex(uality) and Teaching: a forbidden relationship?

Between January and June 1997 before I undertook the interviews, I spent time thinking about the study and identifying key issues. I became interested in gay men's relationship with teaching and the masculinities 'offered' or 'taken up' in and through this relationship. Do gay men approach their teaching in different ways to heterosexual men and how does this relate to their sexuality? What special qualities and experiences might they bring to their teaching? To what extent are they able to challenge or resist dominant approaches to teaching and learning in higher education, and the masculinities which underpin them?

To begin with I stumbled around, fearful of the potential caricature of gay men I could set up through such questioning (i.e. stereotypical representations of the men produced by restrictive lines of enquiry). It also seemed a forbidden relationship—'sex(uality) and teaching'—perhaps like other researchers exploring 'touchy' or 'risky' pedagogical questions (see, for example, McWilliam, 1996; Rowland, 1997), I feared accusations of inappropriacy and sleaze coming my way! I had made contact with a small number of gay higher educators by this point and some of these were later to be formally interviewed. I remember trying out a question about sexuality and teaching for the first time with one of these men (Mark, from Education) in March 1997 by e-mail and was horrified when I got his initial response:

AS: Are there any particular qualities and experiences that gay male educators draw upon and use to enhance their teaching?

Mark: Camping it up to make them laugh? I'm not clear what this is about. In what way does anyone use their sexuality in their teaching? Would anyone ask this question of heterosexual teachers?

I felt horrified because the comment 'Camping it up to make them laugh' seemed to reject that there was anything significant in what I had asked and/or reduced its significance to a damaging stereotypical representation of gay men—something I definitely wanted to avoid. He also pointedly asked: 'Would anyone ask this question of heterosexual teachers?' My initial thought was, 'No—he's right' and I felt extremely uneasy positioned as a potential Persecutor of gay men. However, gradually I asked myself, 'Why is this question not asked of heterosexual men' I came up with the following responses:

1. Heterosexual men's sexuality is thought to be 'unproblematic'. Therefore, the issue seems not to arise. However, this should not stop any enquiring educational researcher from questioning the 'taken-for-granted'.
2. 'Sexuality'—that complex relationship between sexed bodies, sexual desire, and the social contexts in which this relationship is expressed, understood and experienced (see Weeks, 1986; Bristow, 1997)—is often confused with 'the' sex act. Heterosexual men's record of relating the sex act to higher education

teaching is difficult to ask about but important for understanding many women's experience of higher education and the way in which teaching and learning processes in higher education offer possibilities for the construction of dominant masculinities (for example, harassment of women; flirtatious behaviour with female students; male 'performance' in lectures);

3. As a result of (2) it is difficult to ask about the relationship between sexuality and teaching because that relationship is generally viewed with negative connotations. It is difficult to see the relationship in positive terms.

I concluded, therefore, that although one might not think to ask heterosexual men about the relationship between their sexuality and their teaching, there were several good reasons for doing so.

I decided that Mark's initial e-mail response was understandable given that he did not know *how* the question was being asked and *which* meanings were being brought to bear. Of course gay men, like heterosexual men, might be accused of drawing upon their sexuality inappropriately in their teaching. After explaining my interest in more depth and putting the same question to the person for a second time, I got a different response:

(*AS*: Are there any particular qualities and experiences that gay male educators draw upon and use to enhance their teaching?)

Mark: Hmm, I guess the empathy of being an outsider/minority group may help to a certain extent.

The experience of 'being an outsider' was something that a number of other men referred to in their interviews. How this might inform an approach to teaching is discussed in the next section, together with two other salient themes that emerged from a 'multi-step' qualitative processing of data, involving the following main stages: (1) familiarisation with interview material; (2) computer storage; (3) identification of content categories; (4) segmentation of transcripts; (5) retrieval of coded segments; (6) analysis of data; (7) verification—moving back and forth from analytical scheme to data and vice versa; (8) writing research reports (see Skelton, 1998b, p. 102).

Discussion: gay men teaching in higher education

In this section I want to discuss a number of ways in which the gay men in the study drew upon their sexuality in their teaching. I recognise that this sort of discussion runs the risk of caricature so I want to make it clear from the outset that I am not seeking to identify a *monolithic* view of gay men's approach to teaching. Rather, I outline a number of *different* ways in which the participating gay men draw upon their sexuality in their teaching and consider how these approaches disrupt dominant masculinities. It is important to remember that not all gay men will approach their teaching in the ways described and that some heterosexual men may also adopt some of the presented practices (although the meanings of these practices and the way in which these practices relate to sexuality *may* be different).

It is also important to remember that the approaches described might not be indicative of the *totality* of an individual's approach to teaching or their *future* approaches. There is no intention, therefore, to offer a reductive account of fixed and stable gay higher education pedagogies, leading to 'flat' representations of people and behaviour. It should be noted, however, that most of the men's engagement with the approaches described appeared to extend beyond momentary or fleeting engagement; for many their commitments to particular approaches to teaching seemed to be related to searching for a 'teacher identity' that was consistent with their values and their developing identity as a gay man.

In focusing upon the positive connections between gay men's sexuality and their teaching, I do not want to suggest that gay men are always or necessarily the chief proponents of *good practice* in higher education teaching or 'good practice' in terms of challenging the ideology of hegemonic masculinity which underpins such teaching. Miles (also from Education) said to me in the context of talking about a male culture of 'put downs' and 'being smart' within universities: 'That's not to say all gay men are politically correct because I don't think they are. You know, just because they are gay doesn't make them above saying crappy things. And I know because I've heard them say crappy things'.

One could also argue that *real* change around issues of sexuality in higher education will only have been achieved when gay men are allowed to be *ordinary*; ordinary in their teaching and ordinary in their masculine practices. Following this line of argument, it certainly appeared to be the case that the gay men in this study expressed many 'typical' or 'ordinary' concerns about teaching. For example, Phil (from Law) complained about the lack of education/training for university lecturers and, in an effort to teach well (in addition to undertaking research activities in an 'old' university), he had become ill recently and was currently attempting to re-negotiate the boundary between his work and home life. Terry (Continuing Education) felt that the pressure to attract more and more students was leading to a situation where some very worthwhile teaching courses were having to be shelved in favour of those that would bring money into his university. Although Richard (Biomedical Sciences) had chosen at the beginning of his career to work in higher education rather than industry so that he could 'follow up lines of thought which have no apparent commercial value', he was now beginning to doubt whether this was still possible, given the growing instrumental relationship between higher education and the economy.

From these examples, one might want to conclude that gay higher educators are simply 'ordinary', but to do so would be misleading for three main reasons. First, even if gay higher educators share similar concerns about teaching with their heterosexual colleagues and even if they share similar practices, it is unlikely that these concerns and practices will be viewed in the same way. It is instructive to note that it was only in 1973 that the American Psychological Association finally decided that homosexuality was no longer a mental illness, and it is clear that vestiges of a pathological discourse of homosexuality will no doubt remain for many years to come. Even if some gay higher educators may want to appear 'ordinary', therefore, in terms of their orientation towards teaching, it is unlikely that this status will be

allowed them (by many if not all), given the 'special' status of their sexuality and the 'special' status that is likely to be given to the connection between their sexuality and their teaching.

Secondly, some gay higher educators may not want to be understood as 'ordinary'. Whilst sharing some concerns and practices about teaching with heterosexual peers, they might associate 'being ordinary' with an assimilationist perspective and a desire to fit in with the dominant heterosexual culture. For some gay teachers this perspective may appear restrictive since it may close down possibilities for gay scholarship and, given its emphasis on accommodating to the majority culture, it discourages long term cultural change within higher education. Finally, an emphasis on 'being ordinary' does not allow us to recognise any special and distinctive qualities that gay higher educators may bring to their teaching that should be seen as an asset to higher education and an asset to the study of higher education teaching and learning. The purpose of the discussion that follows, therefore, is to redress gaps in our understanding of gay teachers in higher education and to illustrate the positive relationships between gay male sexuality and teaching. It is premised on what Young (1993, p. 123) calls a 'relational', rather than a 'substantial' understanding of difference: one that recognises the need to understand the specificity of different people's experiences, histories and potential contributions as a necessary precondition to understanding how they might live and work together within 'inclusive' communities.

Teaching from the Outside

Many men commented on how their experience of being *an outsider* informed their teaching. Several mentioned that the experience of being outside 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) as a gay man had made them adept at reading people's responses to them. For example, there had been a number of occasions when the ability to pick up on cues from people had been very important in making decisions about when best to tell family/friends about one's sexuality and in protecting oneself from potentially difficult or unsafe situations. Brian, from Continuing Education, commented that the skill of being able to read other people's reactions 'is definitely a very handy spin-off of spending a lot of time trying to think what other people are thinking in ordinary conversation in case there is going to be some come-back'. In the teaching context, this 'cue consciousness' (Miller & Parlett, 1974) was considered useful in developing educative relations with students. For example, identifying students existing understandings, developing a dialogue and evaluating student responses to educational experiences. Early on in his interview Simon (Modern Languages) said 'I just enjoy the dialogue that comes from teaching and the idea of bouncing ideas off other people'. Later he elaborated further by saying:

I think I am much more aware probably of the need to be sensitive to other people's reactions and to be aware of what other people are actually looking for, if you like, within the learning process ... (*and later*)

I think possibly when you are a gay man or a lesbian you are more aware

of other people's attitudes ... that sensitivity can translate itself into the teaching environment as to being more aware of what students are feeling about the way they are being taught and about the knowledge they wish to receive.

However, students were also seen as being 'outside' higher education given the clear power relation between teachers and students. Despite the advent of student evaluation as a formal mechanism associated with Teaching Quality, several gay men felt that there was little genuine interest (amongst lecturers) in how students experienced teaching and learning processes in higher education. Thus some gay men empathised with students' 'outsider' status and adopted a 'student-centred' approach to teaching and learning; an approach which sought to engage with and build upon students' existing understanding through a process of dialogue.

Being an outsider also appeared to inform a 'critical' approach to teaching adopted by some gay men. Their 'deviant' social status relative to the norm encouraged them to question taken-for-granted assumptions not only about people, lifestyle and identity (ontological questions), but also ways of knowing (epistemological questions). Including references to gay and lesbian experience in teaching and sharing their own opinions as gay men were often strategies that informed a broader critical approach. This approach sought to problematise 'common sense' understandings and reveal the vested interests that are responsible, at least in part, for the continuation of such understandings. As David (from Drama) commented:

I always promote the idea in teaching that marginals in society, whether it be in terms of class or race or gender or sexuality or whatever, even religion, have in some ways a privileged, deconstructive perspective on the process of power which, of course, people within it don't.

Simon (Modern Languages) pointed out that one of the most important things about higher education for him was that students develop a 'critical faculty'. He felt that by the final year of study, students should be able 'to deconstruct a particular given situation ... I think that's very important to be teaching them and I think my awareness of the importance of those things is possibly guided by my awareness of my sexuality and how it fits in with the rich tapestry'.

In his book *Critical Business*, Barnett (1997, p. 161) suggests that 'Critique earns its spurs when it illuminates a discourse ..., when it reveals its partiality, its hidden interests and its pretentiousness'. Making reference to gay perspectives and experiences—together with other marginalised perspectives or oppressed 'voices'—was one way in which a number of gay men adopted a critical approach in their own teaching. James (Education) maintained: 'you are more versatile ... more varied ... you are conscious you are not part of the dominant heterosexual masculine thing ... so you bring in more diverse voices—you are conscious that diverse voices exist so that the content is less monolithic, perhaps more open to challenge or enquiry'.

Whilst some gay men in the study found the outside/inside relation useful as part of a critical approach to teaching, two felt that this relation reproduced an unhelpful dichotomy. For them, references to gay, lesbian and other 'minority'

voices as coming from the ‘outside’ uncritically reproduced such positioning and detracted from the exciting new possibilities for thinking that these voices opened up for ‘mainstream’ higher education audiences. They also felt that such references would imply a definitional stability to categories like ‘gay’ which they wanted to contest. Drawing on recent intellectual developments such as postmodernism and ‘queer’ theory (Sedgwick, 1994, p. xii, points out: ‘The word “queer” itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root—*twerkzw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*’), these men talked of a paradigm shift in which teaching and learning processes would need to challenge existing categories of thought, ‘old certainties’ within disciplines, unhelpful dichotomies and reductive dualisms. Within work on sexuality and identity formation within the social sciences this would imply developing new and creative ways of thinking about ourselves:

That’s one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically. (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 8.)

In *all* disciplines, such an approach would require the ‘teacher’ and ‘learner’

to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play, to set up procedures to continuously demystify the realities we create, and to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal. (Caputo, 1987, p. 236.)

Of course, many straight men in higher education develop understandings of themselves in relation to the ideology of hegemonic masculinity; an ideology which we have noted valorises the very things which seem to matter most in the academy today (independence, productivity, autonomy, coolness, rationality, efficiency, separation of personal and professional spheres). This positions them on the *inside* of higher education with little pressing need, therefore, to question their identity or the ‘common-sense’ or ‘taken-for-granted’ understandings of teaching and learning which have been produced and sustained by generations of straight men. ‘Teaching from the outside’ as expressed here challenges the pedagogy of hegemonic masculinity in three main ways. Firstly, it concerns itself with other outsiders—students—who get in the way of the efficient delivery of an expert curriculum. Secondly, it supports a critical approach to teaching which questions normative understandings and the vested interests which underpin them. Finally, it contests the very rationality of accepted ways of thinking within the academy, the very categories, dichotomous positions and ‘old certainties’ that are the building blocks of a rational, scientific and modernist approach to intellectual enquiry.

Teaching as Performance

Several men felt that they were good ‘performers’ or ‘entertainers’ in teaching situations. They talked about ‘not taking yourself seriously’, ‘making people laugh’

and ‘telling stories’. Mark (from Education) who had initially joked about ‘camping it up’ went on to talk about his experiences of public speaking in higher education lectures and at various social functions. For example, he commented on a recent talk he had given at a conference:

It was a four day conference, one major presentation each day and the other three were all up there at the lectern with the whole thing written out ready and gave these very erudite but well rehearsed ... (trails off) I got really worried that I had to put on a different persona and become, you know, the (emphasises the word ‘the’) academic. And in the end I just thought, fuck it, I could do it and I would hate doing it and it would bore everybody rigid so I just did what I do. It’s got camp bits and ... I move in and out of getting the point across and slipping in the bits of business ... I had to write the thing up and I got a colleague to tape record it ... I hate listening to myself on tapes, I think God, you do sound camp. But all the way through ... I can hear my boss say, ‘It’s just amazing, how does he do it?’ Because I can entertain ... I can do that.

Richard (Biomedical Sciences) maintained that one of the most important insights that had informed his approach to teaching was ‘realising that it was acting’ and Simon, from Modern Languages, talked about the importance of entertaining people and how this assisted the learning process:

(E)ducation is fun. If you can make people laugh ... their defences are down and the information goes in. I come up with all sorts of weird and wacky jokes that I use in my teaching practice ... And they remember them year on year—much more than if they’d had somebody standing over them with a board rubber.

In the light of these comments, it is interesting to note that ‘performance’ here does not mean the cool, controlled and masterly (*sic*) performance suggested by the ideology of dominant, hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Nor does it mean the efficient delivery of a predetermined approach to teaching and learning which seeks to raise the ‘performativity’ of higher education and the social system as a whole (Lyotard, 1984). Rather the type of performance referred to by Mark, Richard and Simon appears to recognise more fully the ‘seductive power’ and ‘embodied pleasure’ of the teacher (McWilliam, 1996, pp. 311 & 305), and is underpinned by qualities such as playfulness, irony, self-deprecation, flamboyance and humour.

In identifying ‘camp bits’ in his conference talk, Mark shows how a ‘performance-of-teaching’ is always at the same time a ‘performance-of-gender’. Mark confounds gender expectations by ‘camping it up’—acting and/or talking in a way deemed ‘feminine’—and thereby baffles the seemingly ‘natural’ link between sexed bodies and gender (Butler, 1993). In this way, he entertains the audience and also ‘teaches’ them to reflect upon unquestioned gender expectations.

‘Camping it up’ in a lecture also involves attempting to *re-appropriate* behaviour or qualities that stereotypical representations of gay men have sought to ridicule: for

example, behaviour viewed as ‘effeminate’, ‘weak’ and ‘ineffectual’. Re-appropriation involves taking up these behaviour patterns and qualities for oneself, and turning them into *positive* qualities and/or qualities that gay men might laugh at *themselves* to enhance learning (for example, using ‘campness’ to make people laugh and draw them into the learning process). In laughing at their own camp behaviour, it is clear that gay men may also be able to rob people of the power to ridicule and this might be viewed as an effective form of ‘teacher resistance’ to being oppressed by other teachers and students (Sultana, 1989). However, given the now well-established tradition of mainstream camp performance (that is evident, for example, in the ‘Carry On’ films and in TV sitcoms such as ‘Some Mothers Do Ave Em’, where heterosexual actors act camp and their sexuality is ambiguous), it is difficult to know the extent to which heterosexual audiences, in laughing at such performances, are laughing *at* or *with* gay teachers.

‘Camp performance’ may therefore be viewed as a way in which several of the gay men in this study attempted to engage the learner’s interest, whilst resisting the ideology of hegemonic masculinity. I think it only appropriate to end this section by giving the ‘last laugh’ to Mark, who concludes:

But if push came to shove, if you said to me, if you weren’t gay do you think you would be as you are, then the honest answer is no, I wouldn’t. As a gay man I can go down to my local pub on a Sunday evening and I can do high kicks with the rest of the boys to Liza Minelli singing, ‘New York, New York’ and love it! And if I can do that then I can stand up in front of 400 people and hold their attention without fear.

Teaching as a (Gay) Person

Over half the men addressed issues of sexuality in their teaching. Some used a gay and lesbian perspective to frame their disciplines (Nick, an English lecturer, taught a course on *gay and lesbian literature*), some taught discrete units or sessions on sexuality as part of larger courses and some addressed sexuality within disciplines where they deemed it appropriate. For example, Jack, a lecturer in Law, commented: ‘gay issues arise in law—civil liberties, family law, tourism law, employment law, equal opportunities etc.’

Other men ‘simply’ chose to allow issues of sexuality to emerge in the course of discussions with students and the sharing of views and experiences. Many of the men were ‘out’ to students they taught, and this was seen to be an appropriate and respectful way of relating to students in a teaching/learning relationship. Virtually all of the men preferred a gradual, ‘conversational’ way of coming out to students (for example, Simon, from Modern Languages, said his sexuality often ‘might come up in conversation’) than a punctuated, explicit process of self-identification (although Nick tells students he is gay at the beginning of the course on gay and lesbian literature).

The men’s reasons for ‘bringing their sexuality into’ the teaching relationship varied from person to person. Some talked about a ‘natural’ process of sharing this

in the context of developing educative relationships with students. Some said that it was only 'responsible' and/or 'professional' to include a consideration of a gay perspective(s) as part of a wide-ranging consideration of an issue, topic or subject. Others identified a 'political' perspective which sought to challenge the invisibility of gay men in higher education (as lecturers and students; and as people with particular experiences, and perspectives to bring to bear on the development of knowledge and understanding within different disciplines). Some wanted to offer gay students a relatively safe space within which they might write about and explore issues of sexuality. James (from Education) who includes references to gay experience in lectures on identity commented: 'I don't sort of say I'm speaking as a gay because ... most of them tend to assume it and some say to me, "are you gay?"—you know, they want to tell me something or ask something ... Some young people who are themselves gay ... want to write essays on it (identity) ... they come to see me and say, "can I do an essay on it?" Because they've already seen that at least ... I'm not hostile'.

A story told by Nick (English) demonstrates how these approaches to teaching disrupt hegemonic masculinity. Nick had recently been appointed to a new post in a new institution and he had decided to tell his head of department that he was gay. On doing so, the head of department replied by saying, 'Fine—it won't affect your teaching'. This tells us two things about how hegemonic masculinity constructs teaching and learning in higher education. First, it suggests that gay masculinity, as a subordinate masculinity, should not be allowed to 'affect' (or perhaps 'infect') the teaching process. Secondly, it suggests that it is both possible and desirable for *the person* to be severed from the act of teaching—which therefore becomes reduced to a disembodied, technical act.

Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to do three things. First, I have tried to provide some information on gay men teaching in higher education and to thereby illuminate a relatively unexplored area of study. Secondly, I have attempted to look at a forbidden relationship—the relationship between sex(uality) and teaching—and have identified three different ways in which the gay men featured here draw upon their sexuality productively in their teaching [teaching as an outsider; teaching as performance; teaching as a (gay) person]. Finally, I have considered how the practices which have been presented disrupt dominant masculinities that underpin 'common-sense' and 'taken-for-granted' approaches to teaching and learning in higher education.

The findings of this paper open up possibilities for change in terms of pedagogical and gender practice in higher education. The practices outlined here offer what Felski (1989) and Martino (1995) call 'counter-hegemonic spaces', ways of teaching and being that fall outside those suggested by the ideology of hegemonic masculinity. Of course, many men are already beginning to question dominant models of teaching in higher education because these models are so difficult and/or unrewarding to uphold in everyday life. For example, some men may experience an emptiness

from detaching themselves from the students they teach in the name of Expertise; some may feel alienated by the assumption that new technologies can solve all learning problems in higher education—an assumption which seems to position the teacher as a mere administrator of technical machinery; and some may recognise that an increasingly heterogeneous student population offers exciting new possibilities for reconstructing teaching/learning practices and thinking about curriculum and assessment. This sort of questioning of dominant, masculinist models has been supported by the critiques of higher education offered by various marginalised groups, focusing on power-relations within the academy (for example, see Morley & Walsh, 1995; Bird, 1996). This paper seeks to support men who are exploring new approaches to teaching in higher education, and to encourage men to reflect upon the relationship between their masculine identity and their teaching practices.

We currently know very little about how heterosexual men draw upon their sexuality positively in higher education teaching. Previous research demonstrates that in higher education, just as in schools, a significant number of heterosexual men appear to draw upon their sexuality in abusing women, girls and 'effeminate' boys and men by harassing them or subjecting them to verbal abuse or actual physical harm (Jones, 1985; Beynon, 1989; Mahony, 1989; Butler & Landells, 1995). One might speculate that pro-feminist men have attempted to draw upon their sexuality positively in advocating pedagogies that emphasise intimacy, equality and communication with students (i.e. a sexuality which emphasises intimacy, equality and communication appears to connect with 'learner-centred' pedagogies, and a dissolution of the hierarchical relationship between tutor and student). We need further research into the forbidden relationship between sexuality and higher education teaching. Research which offers all men a way of constructing, and acting upon, this relationship in a positive and productive way.

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