

## Adolescent Masculinity in an age of Decreased Homophobia

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Adolescent masculinity in the 1980s was marked by the need to distance oneself from the specter of ‘the fag.’ In this homophobic culture, compulsory heterosexuality and high rates of anti-gay sentiment necessitated that adolescent boys distance themselves from anything associated with femininity. It was this zeitgeist that brought Connell’s hegemonic masculinity theory to the vanguard of masculine studies. However, homophobia has diminished among adolescents today. Accordingly, in this article, I foreground research extracts from multiple ethnographies on groups of 16-year-old adolescent boys in order to contextualize the repeated and consistent data I find throughout both the United States and the United Kingdom. In explaining how the diminishment of homophobia promotes a ‘One-Direction’ culture of inclusive and highly feminized masculinities, I suggest that new social theories are required.

**Keywords:** Homophobia, inclusive masculinities, homophobia, masculinity, adolescence

## Introduction

September 17, 2012 my (same-sex) husband and I touched-down in London Heathrow Airport with our two new baby boys: created through an egg donor and a surrogate in Southern California. We returned to our middle-class neighborhood outside of Southampton, and were immediately barraged with social support: offers of babysitting, Facebook messages of congratulations, and requests to meet the babies. One of these invitations came from ‘the group’ who wished to meet on ‘the hill’ to hold a celebratory reception.

The group is comprised of 20 heterosexual, adolescent boys and five girls, one of whom is bisexual. I met them while walking my dog in a local park. I sat and talked with them, and was henceforth invited to join them, on a semi-regular basis, to their social events. The gesture of love and acceptance of someone who was not only gay, but three times their age, was overwhelming for me; but normal for them. In fact, this type of gay-inclusivity is the norm for adolescent boys in today’s culture.

Exemplifying this, the night before my family left Southern California, I was emotionally impacted by another group of adolescents: 45 fifteen to seventeen-year-old males (of which two were openly gay) who ran for a local high school that I spent the summer coaching. The team (comprised of white, Hispanic and Asian youth) was as supportive and inclusive as ‘the group’ back in England. In fact, at a going away party they organized for me, one of the 17-year-old boys presented me with baby clothes featuring a rainbow colored heart and the inscription, “Two dads is better than one.”

This social inclusion is heart-warming, yes; but it should not be surprising. I have spent the last eight years conducting dozens of ethnographic studies into adolescent and undergraduate heterosexual masculinities: on athletic teams (Adams, Anderson & McCormack 2010; Anderson 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Anderson,

McCormack & Lee 2012; Anderson & McGuire 2010), within P.E. classes (Anderson  
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2012a), high schools (McCormack and Anderson 2010a), fraternities (Anderson 2008c), and multiple other groups of youths across the United States and the United Kingdom (Anderson 2011c; Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012). Collectively, this research finds that young men today have redefined what it means to be masculine.

I support my ethnographic findings with survey data across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Bush, Anderson and Carr 2012; Southall et al. 2011). Collectively, colleagues and I show a strong relationship between decreasing cultural homophobia and a softening of heterosexual masculinities in Western cultures.

Almost all of the youth that I study distance themselves from the type of conservative forms of muscularity, hyper-heterosexuality, aggression, and stoicism that Connell (1987), Messner (1992), Pollack (1999), and others (Plummer 1999) have described males of the previous generation exhibiting as adolescents. Data from my studies of heterosexual men, in both feminized and masculinized spaces, highlights that the literature drawn on heterosexual men in the 1980s and 1990s—and even some of which was impactful in the early 2000s (Pascoe 2005)—is no longer accurate. This is something affirmed by a growing body of scholars examining the impact of declining homophobia on young men's masculinities (Cavalier 2011; Cashmore & Cleland 2011, 2012; Dashper 2012; Flood 2008, 2009; Gottzén and Kremer-Sadlik 2012; Lyng 2009; McCormack 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Peterson 2011; Roberts 2012; Swain 2006; Thorpe 2010; Way 2011).

My findings, unable to be accounted for through hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell 1987) led me to a new way of theorizing modern masculinities (Anderson 2009a) and for understanding how the relationship between homophobia and the awareness of homosexuality operates in society (Anderson 2011c). Principally speaking, my theory— inclusive masculinity theory—with its embedded concept of homohysteria, explains how

there is no longer a hierarchical stratification of masculinities. Instead, decreasing cultural  
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homophobia and the diminishment of homophobia permits various forms of adolescent masculinities to exist without hegemonic dominance of any one type. The reduction of homophobia has permitted youth to be accepting and inclusive (Savin-Williams 2005)—including advocating for homosexuality. Additionally, the reduction of homophobia has made more feminized appearances and homosocial tactility normal—something exemplified by the homosocial contact between members of the popular boy-band, ‘One Direction.’

In this article, I first provide a snap-shot of what it is like to be a heterosexual 16-year-old in contemporary British culture. I then summarize my body of work among youth, showing what they do to be different, important, and positive in comparison to how young men constructed masculinity two decades earlier. I provide a conceptual explanation for these events with my notion of homophobia, placing it within inclusive masculinity theory more broadly.

### **On being 16 today**

Jake is a sixteen-year-old, heterosexual male. He is just one of many I studied among a group of lower-class, non-educationally aspiring youths in Bristol, England. Jake lives in something of an impoverished neighborhood with his mother and sister on a street which is renowned for the wide availability of drugs. Jake, however, feels safe here. He has a rich network of various types of friends: both male and female, gay and straight, criminally hardened and higher educated. Most of all, Jake expresses his love for his best mate, Tom. He does so both in person and on his Facebook page. Here, Jake expresses as much love for Tom as he does his girlfriend. In fact, he speaks of him in similar terms; freely identifying his friendship to me as “love.” This intimacy, oftentimes described as a bromance, simulates ancient notions of Greek and Roman brotherhood; a time in which men’s homosocial bonds were culturally prized (Spencer 1995).

Illustrating this, Jake told me that he was preparing to go on a thirteen-day holiday to Spain with Tom. When I inquired as to whether he feared that they might fight with Tom, being in close company for such duration, he answered, “No mate. We’re too close for that.” I responded, “Fair enough.” Before asking what his girlfriend thought of the fact that he was taking Tom and not her. Jake answered, “She knows how close we are. She’s gotta share me.”

Although Jake still lives in a heterosexist culture (Ripley et al. 2012), it is one that permits him to have the same level of emotional and physical intimacy with his best male friend as it does his female partner. For example, Jake tells me that he has a busy weekend coming up. He’s spending Friday night with his girlfriend, including sex and cuddling. He will then be spending Saturday night with Tom, doing the same activities with the exception of sex. He informs me that he and Tom sleep in the same bed and cuddle two or three nights a week. This is not unusual; bed sharing is a common practice for adolescent males in England (Anderson 2009a). In fact, Jake spends as many nights in bed with Tom as he does with his girlfriend.

While fishing on an unusually warm spring day, Jake tells me to “Look at this message Tom sent me yesterday.” He hands me his mobile phone and I read the message aloud, “Jake I love you, this week has made me realise how weak I can be without you. And I don’t like not being with you :/x.” “Oh, your girlfriend is sweet,” I tell him. “No, that’s from Tom,” he states matter-of-factly.

What is interesting about Jake’s story is that he is not alone in expressing this type of homosocial intimacy among adolescents in the UK. Jake is therefore not selected here because he is an exception, but because his behaviors are normal in the UK; something McCormack (2012) also documents.

The type of emotional and physical intimacy I describe among British youth also extends to kissing. In other research on 16-year old boys in the UK (Anderson, Adams & Rivers 2012), colleagues and I show that 40% of the heterosexual youths studied have kissed another male friend on the lips. In survey research conducted at a British university, we showed this number to be 89 per cent (Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012). Replicated (yet to be published) studies conducted internationally show that 30 per cent of Australian undergraduate men have kissed on the lips, and ten percent of American undergraduates.

Regardless of how one theorizes these findings, the data is compelling: not only do boys bond over talk of cars, girls, sports and video games; but they now also bond over disclosing secrets to one another and supporting each other emotionally (Anderson 2011c), shopping together and dressing in softer more metrosexual ways (Pompper 2010); accepting sexual minorities (Keleher & Smith 2012); shunning violence (McCormack 2012); and being physically closer than boys have ever been permitted to be without fear of being thought gay (Anderson 2011c). In this matter, adolescent boys today bond over intimacy in the same the way that men once used to over a century ago (Ibson 2002), before homosexuality was widely understood to exist as a reliable and reliable, sizeable and stigmatized portion of men. And this should tell us something important about masculinity theory.

### **Homohysteria**

My academic career is characterized by expanding upon the earlier gender theorizing of Connell (1987) and her use of hegemony in explicating how homophobia has been central to the polarization of hegemonic, complicit, subordinated and marginalized masculinities. And although Connell was not as clear in explicating her ideas as I have summarized, I also expand upon Connell's conception by describing how it is not just homophobia that is important for the distribution of masculinities in the 1980s (the time upon which Connell

developed her theory) but the awareness that homosexuality exists in real and consistent  
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numbers within the population (Kinsey et al. 1948). I suggested it was this combination of elements that limited same-sex physical and emotional intimacy among the heterosexual men Connell described. This I explicate through my notion of *homohysteria* (Anderson 2009a, 2011).

A homohysterical culture necessitates three factors: 1) widespread awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation within a given culture; 2) cultural disapproval towards homosexuality (i.e., homonegativity); and 3) disapproval of men's femininity due to association with homosexuality. Importantly, all three conditions must be maintained for homohysteria to persist.

Illustrating how a homohysterical culture is differentiated from a country that is simply homophobic, I highlight that men in many Arabic cultures are socially permitted to hold hands with another male in public without fear of being labeled as gay. This is because, although there is an extant degree of homophobia in most of the Arabic world (Frank, Camp and Butcher 2010), there also exists a belief that gay men do not exist as a sizable portion of the population (Zuhur 2005). Thus, in comparison to American and Western European nations, most Arabic cultures are homophobic but not homohysterical (Anderson 2011). Men are capable of engaging in physical tactility without the specter of being thought gay.

Ibson (2002) poignantly highlights, through utilizing photos of American men's friendships before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that not only do levels of homohysteria vary between cultures, but that they are temporally existent within. His photos of men lying in bed together, wearing feminine-coded clothing and expressing all manner of homosocial physical tactility, suggests that any given culture can oscillate on homohysteria—dependent upon varying levels of the awareness of homosexuality and the dominant social attitude toward it. I suggest that, in the Western world, homophobia preceded homohysteria in that we had a

notion of what homosexuality was, even if vague. This is to say there is an era of pre-homohysteria.

The era of homohysteria in the West slowly grew as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. This was because there was an increasing cultural awareness that homosexuality existed as a stable and sizeable percent of the population (Kimmel 1996); much of which came through the works of Sigmund Freud (1905) and Alfred Kinsey et al (1948).

In the 1980s homohysteria reached full-fruit. This was a product of HIV/AIDS, which forced homosexuals into the public's view (Peterson and Anderson 2012). As Loftus (2001, p. 765) wrote, "From the 1970s through the mid-1980s, Americans held increasingly traditional religious beliefs, with more people supporting prayer in school, and believing the Bible was the literal word of God."

In this homohysteria culture, gay men were pathologized as feminine, perverted, and dangerous; they were therefore politically vilified (Peterson and Anderson 2012a). Taking into consideration that homosexuality is not as readily socially visible as other categories of stigmatized people; heterosexual men pushed their hyper-masculine and heterosexualizing behaviors to the extreme in order to disassociate themselves from anything related to homosexuality. It was here, in replicating Rambo or Terminator, that heterosexual men desired to be stoic, aggressive, and vehemently homophobic. For it was only in this predisposition that one could hope to escape the specter of the fag.

### **Decreasing Homohysteria**

I argue that homohysteria peaked in the mid-1980s (Anderson 2009) along with the apex of AIDS. However, AIDS also brought a more unified and fervent campaign for the legal and social equality of sexual minorities. By the time the mid-1990s got underway, we began to see a more balanced cultural dialogue about homosexuality (Frank, Camp and

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Boutcher 2010; Loftus 2001). Furthermore as evidence of HIV/AIDS in the heterosexual community grew, the stigma it had previously brought exclusively to gay men waned. This is not to say that the disease was not (and is still not) associated predominately with homosexuality, but that lay people came to understand that HIV/AIDS is not *caused* by homosexuality. A generation of youth grew up knowing AIDS not as a gay disease, but simply a sexually transmitted disease. As this knowledge took hold, social attitudes toward homosexuality began to change.

Changing laws and social norms have begun to erode at cultural homonegativity at an accelerated rate. Today, attitudes about homosexuality are markedly better than they were during the 1990s, or even the early years of the new millennium (Andersen and Fetner 2008; Keleher and Smith 2012; Kozloski 2011; McCormack 2010). This is particularly true of youth; who are emerging into a new zeitgeist.

The reasons for this are complex, but likely reside along other changing mores of sexuality (Anderson 2012b). Over the last two decades there have been wholesale changes to our sexual and gendered society. Changes that add to the massive overhaul of our attitudes toward sex and our sexual practices since Kinsey et al. (1948) conducted their study of male sexuality. These changes have come from many social influences, including: decreasing religiosity of Western cultures, women's liberation, and gay liberation.

Additional influence has come from the advancement of technologies of culture. Particularly, the introduction of social media—which has permitted for widespread exposure to alternative identities—and the increased accessibility to internet pornography—which has ushered in a democratization of sexual desire (Attwood 2010; McNair 2002). For example, whereas teenage boys once traded baseball cards, today they trade digital pornography clips obtained free from websites. The internet provides anyone the ability to instantly access a display of sexual variety. Here a whole range of bodies fuck in all combinations, styles, This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Berghahn Journals in *Boyhood Studies*, available online at <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/boyhood-studies/7/1/bhs070105.xml>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2013, Berghahn Journals.

mixtures, manners and video quality. And, relating to decreased homophobia, today's Porntube.com generation see, early and often, video clips of gays, lesbians and other identities once stigmatized through a Victorian demand for heterosexual missionary sex. Often a heterosexual cannot find his preferred images of heterosexual intercourse without filtering through the images of the acts once highly socially tabooed. Curiosity of the other, or perhaps a desire to simply see what others enjoy, tempts today's heterosexual adolescents into clicking on the link and watching what their heterosexual fathers despised so much. In viewing gay sex, they grow desensitized to it. Thus, the internet, I propose, has been instrumental in exposing the forbidden fruit of homosexual sex, commoditizing and normalizing it in the process.

The internet has also provided sexual and gendered minorities a forum to organize for political action; forums to share life narratives; and forums for heterosexuals to ask sexual minorities 'anything' about their sexual lives. Clearly, the internet has been beneficial in making visible the lives of sexual and gender minorities to the 'normal' heterosexual world. It has taken away our social taboo against asking one's sexual orientation, too. For example, MySpace was the first popular social media site to ask for one's sexual orientation; Facebook, asks whether one is interested in men, women or both. This has severely reduced the notion that homosexuality (particularly) is a 'private' affair. Thus it has helped reduce heterosexism and explicit homonegativity among adolescent males (Keleher and Smith 2012; Kozloski 2011). This may allow them to establish homosocial peer relationships characterized by emotional intimacy and physical tactility (McCormack 2012) the way the members of One Direction do.

The reduction of homophobia has meant that today's youth all know that gay men exist, and they likely believe that they exist in higher percentages than they actually do. But significantly, they increasingly do not care. Importantly, as heterosexuals cease to care about

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whether one is gay or not, it frees them up to associate with things that used to be coded as feminine, and therefore gay. Accordingly, as a cultural level of homophobia changes, the range of acceptable behaviors for adolescent boys also changes.

Take for example the case-in-point of Abraham Lincoln. In 1999, playwright and AIDS activist, Larry Kramer, told *Saloon Magazine*, “There’s no question in my mind [Lincoln] was a gay man and a totally gay man. It wasn’t just a period, but something that went on his whole life.”

I had little trouble believing this when I read it. A few years earlier I had early read a biography about the sixteenth president, revealing that Lincoln maintained a deep relationship with a same-sex friend, James Speed. Explicating this, in the (1999) *Saloon Magazine* article, author Carol Lloyd wrote:

The 28-year-old traveler was tall, with rough hands, a chiseled jaw and unforgettable, deep-set, melancholy eyes. He arrived in town, his worldly possessions in two battered suitcases, and inquired at a general store about buying some bedding. But the price was far beyond his budget. The strikingly handsome 23-year-old merchant took pity on the man and invited him into his own bed, free of charge, which happened to be just upstairs. The traveler inspected the bed and, looking into the merchant's sparkling blue eyes, agreed on the spot. For the next four years the two men shared that bed along with their most private fears and desires.

I frequently used Lincoln as an example of a gay man when describing historically influential sexual minorities to my American students in sociology. When my students inevitably protested, I simply pointed out to them this four-year bed sharing with James Speed fact. I added that Lincoln continued to share a bed with multiple other boys and men well into his years as a statesman. And here, a remarkable thing occurred: None of my students contested

this evidence. Nor did I. Why would a heterosexual male willingly share a bed with another man when he had the means not to?

To my male students of the mid 1990s through early part of the first decade of the 2000s, sharing a bed with another man as a permanent feature of one's living arrangement, served as indisputable evidence that one was gay. But this is not the case with my students in England today. When I tell them that Abraham Lincoln shared a bed, they do not conclude he was gay.

Although I did not know it at the time, Larry Kramer, my students, and I were all making judgments concerning the past based off of our current zeitgeist. I made my Lincoln-as-gay analysis through a bias, contemporary lens. This is something historians call *presentism*. Accordingly, when I discuss below how young, ostensibly heterosexual, adolescent males in Western cultures behave today, for many, it raises flags of homosexual suspicion. This, however, would be an erroneous reading of what is occurring within youth culture. What we are observing is not the homosexualization of a generation, but the development of a new form of predominant—but not dominating—masculinities.

### **Inclusive Masculinities**

In studying young men in both the United States and the United Kingdom, I show that adolescents are eschewing the homophobic orthodox masculinity of the 1980s. Instead, men are establishing homosocial relationships based on a number of traits including: 1) increased emotional intimacy (Adams 2011, McCormack 2011a); 2) increased physical tactility (McCormack 2011b); 3) eschewing violence (Anderson 2011b), and; 4) the social inclusion of gay male peers (Anderson and Adams 2011; Bush, Anderson and Carr 2012; McCormack 2012b).

I argue that these improving cultural conditions have been the result of decreasing homophobia among adolescent males; which results in further softening of masculinity—

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something McCormack (2012, p. 63) calls a “virtuous circle of decreasing homophobia and expanded gendered behaviours.” Collectively, I call the various forms of masculinities embodied by these boys, ‘inclusive masculinities.’

### *Increased emotional intimacy*

The above section, explicating the life of Jake, captures the type of emotionality common among young men in my various studies. Whether it be running with high school boys in California, fishing with 16 year-olds in Bristol, or hanging out with ‘the group’ in Southampton, one characteristic remains constant: support. In each of these ethnographies emotionally supporting one another is fundamental to their friendships. Uniquely, this support does not permit a ‘suck it up’ mentality. Boys are generally interested in hearing the feelings of their friends, even when those feelings are an admission of fear or weakness.

For example, when Tim announced on FB status that his parents decided to divorce his wall was loaded with messages of support. His friends wrote that they cared about him and were worried for him. And when Ben entered a singing competition, he received dozens of messages of support on his Facebook wall. McCormack’s (2011a) study of a British sixth form, where boys are esteemed for providing emotional support, provides detailed analysis of this.

### *Increased physical tactility*

The emotional support that young men show for each other extends into acts of physical tactility, too. In addition to finding a great deal of hugging, caressing and cuddling (McCormack 2012; McCormack and Anderson 2010a), my colleagues and I (Anderson, Adams & Rivers 2012) show that eighty-nine per cent (of those randomly or strategically selected for interview) have, at least once, kissed another heterosexual male friend on the cheek. This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Berghahn Journals in *Boyhood Studies*, available online at <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/boyhood-studies/7/1/bhs070105.xml>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2013, Berghahn Journals.

lips. The men understand these kisses as being free of sexual connotation and instead understood them as an expression of homosociality.

The fear of homosexualization that deterred my high school teammates from sleeping in the same bed, even if fully clothed, without a great deal of homophobic posturing (Flowers & Buston 2001) does not exist for adolescents today. Not only do boys who sleep together, but they oftentimes do so in their underwear. Nudity is also important to adolescent male bonding, particularly in sport (McCormack 2012). It is common and easy to find shirtless photos of adolescent males embracing their male friends. Some youths post photos of themselves showering with their friends (usually when on holiday).

### *Eschewing violence*

In ethnographic work with 22 heterosexual players from a small, Catholic, university soccer team in the American Midwest, I show (Anderson 2011b) that violence among these 22 players was less than one might expect for contact-sport athletes: only three reported having fought in high school (all occurred on the soccer field), and only one player has been in a fight since coming to university (again on the soccer field). Conversely, most of the men had never been in a fight.

When we asked Tom about his fighting history, he said, “No. I have never been in a fight. Why would I?” John said, “Fighting is just stupid. It accomplishes nothing. It’s not like after [the fight] two guys fight one goes, ‘Oh, I see things your way now.’” However, I was particularly struck by Clint’s attitude toward fighting. While spitting tobacco into a cup, and with his baseball cap twisted backward, he told me “No. I’ve never been in a fight. There’s just no reason to fight.”

Similarly, McCormack (2012) found among the 16-18 year-old boys he studied in the United Kingdom, at a high school he investigated for a one-year period, there was not a  
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single fight. An examination of school records indicate that there had not been a fight at the school in the previous three years.

### *The inclusion of gay male peers*

In ethnographic work at 'Standard High' McCormack and I (2010) found that teenage boys stood firmly against homophobia. When we raised the issue of homophobia in interviews, all informants positioned themselves against it. Although this is not in-and-of-itself proof of a homophobia-free culture, it is nonetheless noteworthy that no male student expressed homophobia in interview. Instead, homophobia was regarded as a sign of immaturity. Matt said that if someone was homophobic he would be policed by his peers. "He wouldn't keep at it for long", he said, "It's just childish." Justin added, "When I was in middle school, some kids would say 'that's gay' around the playground, but they wouldn't get away with it anymore. We'd tell them it's not on." The youths studied agreed that homophobia, in any form, was not acceptable. Sam said, "You might find that [homophobia] before [sixth form], but not here. It's just not acceptable anymore."

Supporting these statements, participant observation highlighted that the word 'gay' is not used to describe dissatisfaction by these young men. In fact, neither researcher heard any homophobic epithet in any social setting we investigated. Terms such as 'queer' and 'poof' were not used, while 'fag' was only when referring to a cigarette. 'Gay' was only used in sensible discussions about gay identity and sexuality.

McCormack (2012b) has provided further evidence of the inclusion of sexual minority students in an ethnography of a religious sixth form. He showcases the stories of one lesbian, one gay, one bisexual and one transgendered student, drawing out the differences in their experiences, but nonetheless showing positive changes in their school experiences compared with research from previous decades (see also Ripley *et al* 2011).

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## Theorizing Masculinities for a new Generation

The type of masculinity exhibited by the youth that my colleagues and I have studied is starkly different than what the dominant paradigm suggests about young men, which maintains that they are homophobic, sexist, violent, emotionally repressed, and afraid of physical contact with other males. The most important theoretical tool for understanding masculinities and the social stratification of men since sex role theory has come thorough Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which has also embedded in it this 'man as jerk' archetype (Carrigan & Connell 1985).

Developed from a social constructionist perspective in the mid-1980s, hegemonic masculinity theory has articulated two social processes. The first concerns how all men benefit from patriarchy; however, it is the second social process that has been heavily adopted by the masculinities literature. Here, Connell's theoretical contribution has been particularly adopted for its conceptualization of the mechanisms by which an intra-masculine hierarchy is created and legitimized. It is solely this aspect of her theory that I address here.

In conceptualizing intra-masculine domination, Connell argues that one hegemonic archetype of masculinity is esteemed above all other masculinity types. So that boys and men who most closely embody this one standard are accorded the most social capital, relative to other boys and men. Some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity concern variables which are earned, like attitudinal depositions (including the disposition of homophobia) while other variables concern static traits (i.e. whiteness, heterosexuality, and youth). Connell argued, however, that regardless of body mass, age or even sporting accomplishments, gay men are at the bottom of this hierarchy. Furthermore, Connell maintained that straight men who behaved in ways that conflict with the dominant form of masculinity are also marginalized. It was for these reasons that I have argued homophobia has traditionally been

an effective weapon to stratify men in deference to a hegemonic mode of heteromascuine dominance (Anderson 2005a; Kimmel 1994).

Connell theorized (1987) that the power of a hegemonic form of masculinity was that those subjugated by it nonetheless believed in the right of those with power to rule. So instead of disputing their marginalized position, they revered those at the top.

Hegemonic masculinity theory was precise in its ability to predict masculine configurations in the 1980s, and it likely continued to be useful throughout the 1990s. The high level of homophobia and hypermasculinity of the mid 1980s—something measured through General Social Survey data in the States alongside the *British Survey of Social Attitudes* in the United Kingdom—has serious implications for not only attitudes toward gay men, but also on how straight men performed their gender (Peterson & Anderson 2012). Thus, hegemonic masculinity theory is historically contextualized within its own temporal moment—specifically, and although Connell did not understand it this way, it existed in a homohysteria culture (Anderson 2009a).

The collection of these findings, and the development of my heuristic concept of homohysteria, led me to the development of a new gendered theory of masculinity studies. *Inclusive masculinity theory* captures the social dynamics of men in non-homohysteria settings. The theory is simple: it maintains that as homohysteria decreases, men no longer need to position themselves as hypermasculine in order to be thought heterosexual. As homohysteria decreases the vertical stratification that Connell describes is no longer accurate, as culture shifts to permit multiple types of masculinity without hierarchy or hegemony. Should cultural matters change, and homohysteria were to again rise, the ordering of men would likely return to the way Connell conceptualized.

Inclusive masculinity supersedes hegemonic masculinity theory because it is a more dynamic theory. It can be used to explain men's masculinities within multiple settings, and This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Berghahn Journals in *Boyhood Studies*, available online at <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/boyhood-studies/7/1/bhs070105.xml>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2013, Berghahn Journals.

within a culture of any level of homophobia. When Connell devised hegemonic masculinity theory in the mid-1980s, there was no such thing as a Western culture low in homophobia. But the significant change that had occurred since makes Connell's theory unuseful in today's culture.

Multiple other scholars are recognized this, and used my theory (Adams 2011; Cavalier 2011; Daspher 2012; Cleland & Cashmore 2011, 2012; McCormack 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012; Peterson 2011; Roberts 2012). While it is not yet possible to tell whether inclusive masculinity theory will replace hegemonic masculinity theory, its adoption by other scholars is evidence of the erosion of the dominance of hegemonic masculinity theory.

Finally, I make inclusive masculinity theory very simplistic, intentionally. It was my desire to avoid inaccessible, and oftentimes vague, theorizing by elitist and intellectually marginalizing academics. To me a social theory should be simple, and have the ability to make a prediction. I shun academic-elitism. Thus, I have made an open invitation to other scholars to examine my theory and add to it (hoping they do so in accessible and practical ways).

McCormack (2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012) is one scholar who has met this challenge. He recently contributed to inclusive masculinity theory by explicating how popularity is achieved in cultures where bullying and marginalization are not present. McCormack (2012) shows that what makes boys popular is not regulating others, but instead being inclusive, being emotionally open, having charisma, and holding social fluidity. Thus, hegemony, he argues, is replaced by heterogeneity.

## **Discussion**

In this overview of the research I have been conducting on gay and straight male youths over the previous decade, I have argued that inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson  
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2009a) supersedes hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell 1987) as it explains the diminishment of a stratification of men during times of lower homophobia. The theory was constructed to explain settings in which young heterosexual men are no longer afraid to act or otherwise associate with symbols of homosexuality. Here, heterosexual boys are permitted to engage in an increasing range of behaviors that once led to homosexual suspicion, all without threat to their publicly perceived heterosexual identities. This is why the boy band 'One Direction' can be so tactile with each other compared to all previous boy-bands. This is not a marketing strategy but a reflection of the masculine culture they emerged in.

Supporting this, in my various ethnographies I have found that fraternity members (Anderson 2008b), rugby players (Anderson and McGuire 2010), school boys (McCormack and Anderson 2010a), heterosexual cheerleaders (Anderson 2008c), and even the men of a Catholic College soccer team in the Midwest (Anderson 2011b) have all been shown to maintain close physical and emotional relationships with each other. Collectively, these studies (and many more) highlight that as cultural homophobia diminishes it frees heterosexual men to act in more feminine ways without threat to their heterosexual identity. I suggest that in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia (and likely in other Western cultures) we have dropped out of homophobia. Whereas homophobia used to be the chief policing mechanism of a hegemonic form of masculinity (Kimmel 1994, 1996), there no longer remains a strident cultural force to regulate a singular type of homophobic masculinity.

I do not, however, claim that inclusive masculinities are completely free of oppression and subordination. A diminished state of homophobia is not to be mistaken as a gender utopia. Men categorized as belonging to one archetype of a set of inclusive masculinities might still reproduce heteronormativity (Ripley et al 2012); they might still sexually objectify women (Anderson 2008a); they might still value excessive risk taking (Adams, Anderson, This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Berghahn Journals in *Boyhood Studies*, available online at <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/abstract/journals/boyhood-studies/7/1/bhs070105.xml>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2013, Berghahn Journals.

and McCormack 2010); they might even use homophobic discourse without intent to wound (McCormack 2011c). My data does however indicate that in the process of proliferating inclusive masculinities, gender itself, as a constructed binary of opposites, may be somewhat eroding. I argue that the efforts of the first, second, and now, third waves of feminism—combined with advancements in technology, the gay liberationists efforts of the past four decades, and the erosion of other sexual mores, have slowly eroded the gender binary (Anderson 2009a). Increasingly, gender is a business of decreasing polarization between not only women and men, but between heterosexual and gay men as well.

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