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## Full-forward and, Macho homos : toward a masculist reframing of male homosexuality

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# **FULL-FORWARD**

**Macho Homos: Toward a Masculist Reframing of Male  
Homosexuality**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The following work explores the nexus of male homosexuality and traditional masculinity.

The creative work examines the ways in which both patriarchal and popular, purportedly feminist or queer theorist cultures arbitrarily assign allegedly immanent feminine qualities to homosexual males even when these characteristics are not congruent with the male subject. This facet of western, and specifically Australian, culture is explored through the prism of a hegemonically masculine ‘country boy’ who finds that despite his own comportment and identity, he becomes culturally and socially feminised by virtue of his homosexuality alone. He experiences isolation, angst, anger and cognitive dissonance as he grapples with unifying his sexuality and his masculine identity.

The accompanying essay analyses the cultural conflation of male homosexuality with effeminacy, examining the ways in which patriarchal and ostensibly feminist popular media discourses not only feminise the male homosexual but problematise, delegitimise and render invisible the masculine homosexual or the “macho homo” identity. Given the existing evidence and research to indicate that many homosexual men identify as traditionally masculine, the case is made for reifying the “macho homo” via a proposed reframing of male homosexuality in a masculist framework.

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## MACHO HOMOS

### **Toward a Masculist Reframing of Male Homosexuality**

Masculinity has taken a number of forms through history, with the dominant ideology of a particular culture and era dictating to men how they should perform their gender in order to be considered valuable or virtuous (Spector Person, 2006). In western patriarchal systems, men portray themselves in a particular manner in order to meet cultural criteria of masculinity (Webb, 1998; Biddulph, 1995; Connell, 1995). Although masculinity as a concept has been critiqued by feminism and queer theory, Clarkson (2006), Payne (2007), De Visser & Smith (2007), and Eguchi (2011) have discovered, along with others in the *Journal of Men's Studies*, that traditional ideas of masculinity continue to inform, influence and appeal to both heterosexual and homosexual men.

At this point, it is useful to consider Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler argues, 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990, p. 33). Butler asserts that there is no such thing as an inherent, concrete quality of 'maleness' within each male human being; that, rather, men *perform* maleness based on a variety of expressions.

With that in mind, what constitutes hegemonic masculinity? What makes a man culturally masculine? Theorists have argued that signifiers of masculinity include: 'dress, physical stance and movement, vocabulary and speech' (Webb, 1998, p. 6); 'violence, school resistance, minor crime, heavy drug/alcohol use, occasional manual labour, motorbikes or cars, short heterosexual liaisons' (Connell, 1995, p. 110); leadership and fatherhood (Biddulph, 1995); being a 'wild man' or a warrior archetype, with a connection with nature and an essentialised 'deep masculine' (Bly, 1990, p. 8); sexual potency and performance (Bordo, 1999); 'facial hair, a deeper voice, ... larger body sizes, a higher ratio of muscle to fat, and a greater upper-body strength' (Chesebro, 2001, p. 41; cited in Eguchi, 2011); alcohol consumption (De Visser & Smith, 2007); misogyny and dominance over women (Clarkson, 2006); 'domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, and control' (Cheng, 1999, p. 295); and the sporting prowess and arrogance of the 'jock' identity (Pascoe, 2003).

Notably, these factors are closely aligned to traditional masculinity: the pluralised or inclusive masculinities postulated by feminism and queer theory do not resonate with these theorists or the men they interviewed as typical masculine behaviour.

The common factor that is consistently raised as the central signifier of hegemonic masculinity – what Connell (1995), adopting terminology from Adrienne Rich, calls ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (p. 104) - is that men are taught from an early age that they are supposed to desire, and have intercourse with, women if they are to be real and masculine men. This echoes Butler’s heterosexual matrix, which she defines as:

[a] hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, p. 194)

In other words, the heterosexual object choice is culturally assumed as normal, so when a male’s sexual object choice is another male he must accordingly be feminine, for only opposites attract.

### **Feminising the Masculine: Homosexual Male Essentialism**

Butler’s heterosexual matrix points to patriarchy’s feminisation of the male homosexual. Connell (1995) expands this, stating that ‘patriarchal culture has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity’ and ‘accordingly, [this creates] a dilemma about masculinity for men who are attracted to other men’ (p. 143). Connell (1995) further argues:

The dominant culture defines homosexual men as effeminate. This definition is obviously wrong as a description of the men interviewed here, who mostly do ‘act like a man’. But it is not wrong in sensing the outrage they do to hegemonic masculinity. The masculinity of their object-choice subverts the masculinity of their character and social presence. This subversion is a structural feature of homosexuality in a patriarchal society where hegemonic masculinity is defined as exclusively heterosexual ... Homosexual masculinity is a contradiction for a

gender order constructed as modern Western systems are. (Connell, 1995, p. 161-162)

Connell makes two vital points here. Firstly, he demonstrates that homosexuality and masculinity are culturally viewed as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, since patriarchal culture favours the masculine over the feminine and ascribes power and success to male roles, this subordinates homosexual men into a feminine position (also ascribed to women): a position that is both *separate* from, and *lesser* than, hegemonic masculinity.

Secondly, Connell points out that most homosexual males do strongly identify with the male gender and do act like traditionally masculine men. Some crucial points should be highlighted here. Firstly, gender behaviour is a spectrum, and homosexual men should be expected to run the spectrum of masculine-feminine behaviour in the same way heterosexual men realistically might (Butler, 1990; Buchbinder, 1994; Hines, 2009). The macho homo identity does not deny potential effeminacy in homosexual men, or argue that it is worse than masculinity: it simply argues that this comportment is not immanent and it is not by virtue of sexual orientation. While there are some men who do identify as gay and do exhibit effeminate behaviours, this is no less performative than traditionally masculine behaviour. The problem is that popular discourses have ascribed this behaviour as performative/fake while the effeminacy has been essentialised. This is, however, something that many have rejected.

Many theorists and other writers interested in the area (Hines, 2009; Ward, 2008; Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Malebranche, 2007; Clarkson, 2006; Spector Person, 2006; Buchbinder, 1998) have noted that many – and arguably most – homosexual men do present themselves as masculine and identify with a male identity. Some – like some heterosexual men – display machismo (aggressive or hypermasculine behaviour), and build muscular bodies at the gym (Hines, 2010; Spector Person, 2006; Buchbinder, 1994). Many play sports like rugby or baseball, or are rodeo riders (Hines, 2009); many are ‘socially masculinized’ and work in male-dominated trades and manual labour jobs (Connell, 1995, p. 146; Hines, 2009); and many are in the armed forces (Zeeland, 1996). Buchbinder even tentatively proposes that:

gay men are *more* masculine than straight men in that the homosexual fascination with the penis (and with the large penis) is in some way ‘purer’ than its heterosexual equivalent, since it is part of an all-male discourse, uncontaminated, as it were, by reference to the female. (Buchbinder, 1994, p. 79)

Given that maleness is deemed ‘virtuous’ by patriarchy, the act of male-male sex could, theoretically, be seen as inherently more masculine than the heterosexual males who express a love for the feminine, which patriarchy devalues. This is an argument that Spector Person also explores (2006, p. 1178). Ward (2008) argues that, ‘while some men who have sex with men prefer to do so within gay/queer cultural worlds, others (such as the “straight dudes” described here) indicate a greater sense of belonging or cultural ‘fit’ with heterosexual identity and heteroerotic culture.’ (p. 116). Ward asserts that men who have sex with men can in fact be, and identify as, hegemonically masculine without this identity being necessarily problematised. With regards to these men, she adds:

... the need to strongly disidentify with gay men and gay culture is less a symptom of the repression of a ‘true self’, but rather an attempt to express a ‘true self’ – or one’s strong sense of identification with heteropatriarchal white masculinity – in the context of having sex with men. (Ward, 2008, p. 116)

Although Ward argues this for men who have sex with men but do not identify as homosexual, this is closely paralleled with the idea of the macho homo: men who have sex with men, and identify as homosexual but not with the feminised ‘gay’ role. Ward’s argument is thoroughly countercultural, arguing against the assertion that male same-sex desire equates with essentialised femininity or disconnect from the masculine. *Au contraire*, she posits that many men who have sex with men are either inherently masculine or simply identify more with the masculine; in any case, her theory supports the integration of homosexuality with hegemonic masculinity, and an expansion of the latter concept. Ward, Buchbinder, Spector Person and others argue convincingly that, despite deeply-embedded assumptions about male homosexuality, there exist many masculine homosexual men who, aside from their sexuality, otherwise perfectly conform to and identify with hegemonic masculinity.

Despite the existence of such men, Linneman (2008) argues that homosexual males often have their gender ascribed to them culturally, rather than identifying with a gender by their own compoartment or volition. He argues: ‘... American culture does a thorough job of connecting gay masculinities to a more broadly subordinated gender form: femininities. While many gay men may no longer act effeminately, they remain feminized’ (2008, p. 584). Linneman claims there is a divide between how homosexual men behave and how they are culturally represented, and that feminisation, far from being a simple reflection of an intrinsic reality, is used as a cultural and ideological tool to render the homosexual male as subaltern: ‘Feminization may also serve to castigate the gay man, stigmatizing him as “no better than a woman”. [This] simultaneously oppress[es] woman and gay men’ (2008, p. 585).

Some have argued that the cultural conflation of sexuality and gender is a feature of patriarchal culture and a cause of homophobic attitudes (De Visser & Smith, 2007; Clarkson, 2006). Linneman (2008) elaborates further: ‘It is not only the same-sex sexual acts that repulse some heterosexual men but also the various gender transgressions that are assumed to accompany gay identity’ (p. 585). Heterosexual men reject homosexual men from ‘fraternity’ in order to keep their own identity untainted by the feminine attributes that the gay identity is seen to possess; and thus homosexual men are ascribed to an essentialised, feminised position: patriarchy renders them abject.

### **The Gay Man: From *Will & Grace* to *Glee***

The confluence of the 1969 Stonewall riots and the burgeoning feminist movement helped homosexually-attracted men to solidify an identity (Stein, 2012; Hequembourg & Ardit, 1999; Escoffier, 1985). The context of oppression must be considered here, rather than pure gender politics: both feminism and the gay rights movement offered homosexual men a conduit for fighting lifelong oppression, and an ideology whereby they were not demonised for their sexual object choice (Stein, 2012). Feminism did not render homosexual men abject for being feminised; they were embraced and identified, accurately, as victims of patriarchal oppression; and in turn, as Stein argues, ‘many gay liberation men embraced feminism and linked their oppression to the oppression of women’ (2012, p. 83) and parts of the gay liberation movement ‘embraced male femininities’ (2012, p. 83). It is, however, impossible to accurately speak of feminism (or queer theory), as monolithic: both encompass many different

strands of thought, and it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper to interrogate this diversity in finer detail. However, despite this proliferation, there is a particular brand of thought, purporting to be feminist, that is typically represented in popular media discourses. This ideology, particularly popular since the late 1990s (Fejes, 2000), has to a large extent maintained patriarchal representations of male homosexuals as innately effeminate, with little more than a simple re-evaluation of this identity from 'abject' to 'acceptable'. It is arguable that these popular media representations pushed the feminised 'gay' identity even further, from 'acceptable' to 'laudable' and *preferable* to hegemonic masculine behaviour. Dyer (2002), in his discussion of camp behaviour and its implications, expressed conflicted views but ended up siding with the continued feminisation of homosexual men nonetheless, stating 'I'd rather gay men identified with straight women than with straight men ...' (p. 50-51). Homosexual men continue to be feminised, and thus patriarchal assumptions are reinforced.

Fejes (2000) highlights late 1990s films like *The Object of My Affection*, *As Good as it Gets* and *My Best Friend's Wedding* as forwarding 'a representation of gay males that in no way challenges the heteronormativity of mainstream society' (p. 116). Fejes included *Will & Grace* (Kohan & Mutchnick, 1998) in this same category; in the hit sitcom, the character Jack McFarland serves as an extremely camp gay character who obsessed with fashion, his body and appearance, and female musical divas like Cher and Jennifer Lopez. Will Truman, although to some extent more typically 'masculine' and certainly less flamboyant than Jack (much has been written about the significance of Will's surname) is still portrayed as feminised (Linneman, 2008): he, too, is a fan of musicals, cooking, his own body and appearance – all 'feminised' interests. This is especially evident in a season three episode in an exchange with Grace:

Will: Hey, I'm allowed to watch sports, okay? 'Cause I'm a guy. That's what guys do. Now get me a beer.

*[Grace looks away and back, puzzled]*

Will: Who am I kidding? I want a spritzer. I'll never pull this off. (Kohan & Mutchnick, 1998)

Engaging in typically masculine behaviours – drinking beer, watching sports on TV – is seen as a charade; because Will is gay, he cannot 'pull [masculinity] off' convincingly. Masculine behaviour (beer and sports) from a homosexual man is represented as false or



pretend; a spritzer and musicals are portrayed as genuine. Will's homosexuality has innately feminised him; he is excluded from hegemonic masculinity by virtue of his sexual object choice.

The cast of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was another relatively early example, where five gay men performed 'makeovers' of usually straight men, each specialising in typically feminine domains: fashion, personal grooming, food preparation, interior design and culture (Collins, 2003). In his discussion of *Queer Eye*, Hart (2004) argued that this was a positive representation because it was "ultimately offering representations of gay men as beings that appear to be superior to heterosexuals" (p. 241). He argued moreover that, in embodying extremely effeminate stereotypes, the cast served to somehow reconstruct ideas of masculinity for homosexual men. Hart's arguments are both simplistic and problematic. Apart from being offensive to, and inaccurate about, heterosexual men, there is no reasoning offered for how this representation might change preconceptions about homosexual men: the intrinsic effeminacy is only exaggerated to a hyperbolic level; harmful patriarchal assumptions are reinforced. What Hart might be referring to is that these assumptions are viewed as 'good' instead of 'bad' – a concept discussed above – however, this does nothing to actually alter the paradigm of what is meant by homosexuality in a gender behaviour sense. Furthermore, in essentialising gay men as fashionable and straight men as poorly-groomed – a culturally-held homosexual stereotype indicated by Madon (1997) – the programme reifies the apparently uncrossable chasm between homosexuality and traditional masculinity.

Following, and coinciding with, *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was a slew of television and film representations of homosexual men. The trope of the feminised gay character has become so broadly disseminated and accepted as 'truth' that it would be nearly impossible to assemble an exhaustive list of modern filmic texts that have employed this assumption in some way or another. Well-known mainstream television examples include Bob and Lee in *Desperate Housewives* (Cherry, 2004); Cameron and Mitchell in *Modern Family* (Levitan & Lloyd, 2009); Stanford and Anthony from *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998); Marc in *Ugly Betty* (Hayek, Horta, Silverman, Tamez, & Fields, 2006); and Bryan and David in *The New Normal* (Adler & Murphy, 2012).

Among this proliferation, the television series *Glee* (Murphy, Falchuk & Brennan, 2009) offers perhaps the most prominent and extreme example of the feminisation of the homosexual male. One of the show's main characters is Kurt Hummel, a gay teenager whose interests include musicals and high fashion. Throughout the show, Kurt is portrayed as an extremely feminised and 'othered' male, both through his own behaviour and his social interactions. He once states to a female friend, '... but our periods don't come until the end of the month!' (Murphy et al., 2009). He also regularly dresses in an effeminate style or, on occasion, in actual items of women's clothing. At one point he claims to be 'a half hour behind on my moisturiser routine' (Murphy et al., 2009). At various times when the Glee club is separated into groups by gender for various songs, Kurt has sometimes attempted to join the girls' group. He likes the word 'fabulous' and is, in short, a crystallisation of the feminised behaviours often attributed to homosexual men (Madon, 1997). Interestingly, Kurt shows a double-standard with regards to being perceived as feminine: he once mentions bringing Finn 'a glass of warm milk every night, just in the hopes we may have a little lady chat' (Murphy et al., 2009); however, when this word is applied to him by Sue, he takes offence:

Kurt: When you call me "lady", that's bullying and it's really hurtful.

Sue: I'm sorry. I genuinely thought that was your name. (Murphy et al., 2009)

Kurt on one hand identifies with the feminine and to an extent prides himself on this; and on the other, he recognises that when the same attribute is applied by others as an insult (e.g. by Sue), it functions in the patriarchal manner of subordination. What is not raised is that the framework of *Glee* is, in both cases, reinforcing the immanent femininity of Kurt because he is homosexual. Sometimes Kurt identifies it as subjugation and rejects it (homosexual feminisation from patriarchy) and at other times it is claimed by Kurt as positive and part of 'being gay' (the feminist reversal of feminised men as a 'good' thing). In either case, Kurt continues to be *essentialised* as feminine and separated from hegemonic masculinity by virtue of his sexuality. This is possibly best exemplified with reference to Kurt's father, Burt, who claims he knew Kurt was gay because 'all [he] wanted for [his] birthday was a pair of sensible heels' (Murphy et al., 2009). In a later episode, Burt tells Kurt: 'You're gay. And you're not like Rock Hudson gay, you're really gay. You sing like Diana Ross and you dress like you own a magic chocolate factory' (Murphy et al., 2009). What is, in fact, denoted by

the word gay in this exchange is 'effeminate': 'gay' is not used here as a signifier of male-male sexual activity; it is simply referring to behaviour considered to be feminine. This characterises Kurt throughout the show: he is represented as delicate, cute, non-threatening, easily teary, certainly unable to physically defend himself (indeed he is consistently portrayed as a victim), and to a large extent he functions as a de-sexualised object for the teenage girl characters on the show to befriend and be entertained by. The brand of feminine behaviour exhibited by Kurt is beyond even what is displayed by the female characters on the show – he is portrayed as far weaker and less able than the girls to withstand bullying or threats. Moreover, contrasted with the straight males on the show, like Finn and Puck, who play football, are aggressive and self-assured, Kurt is certainly rendered as an entirely unmasculine character.

### **Homosexual Masculinity: De-legitimised, Problematised and Rendered Invisible**

Popular media's feminisation of homosexual men is not entirely homogenous: some texts have attempted to subvert the archetype by showing 'gays' as either not-too-effeminate, or close to masculine. This is, however, done infrequently and rarely effectively, as it tends to be used to reinforce the very assumptions it purports to reject. Dave Karofsky in *Glee* is a stereotypical jock who bullies the other students before later being revealed to be a latent homosexual (Murphy et al., 2009). However, far from his masculinity – sporting prowess, aggression, strength – being represented as qualities he possesses inherently, these tend to be portrayed as signs of Karofsky 'acting straight' – a 'cover up' of the true 'gay' (read: effeminate) identity. His masculine behaviour is portrayed as superficial and pretend. A similar example is Matt from *Will & Grace*, a sports fan and a sports reporter, who is swiftly revealed to be thoroughly closeted and unwilling to accept his homosexuality (Kohan & Mutchnick, 1998). Rather than opening up a new form of masculine homosexuality, this entrenches the mutual exclusivity of the two concepts. Likewise, it suggests that homosexual men who identify as hegemonically masculine (or as close to it as they can get) are *not okay with being feminine* and are therefore *not okay with being homosexual*, since the two are still conflated.

*The Sum of Us* (McElroy, Sullivan, Burton, & Dowling, 1994) is an Australian film starring Russell Crowe as Jeff Mitchell, an openly gay plumber. Jeff is almost engineered to be the typical working class Australian male: he plays rugby, is muscular,

drives a ute, drinks beer with mates, smokes joints, curses and speaks in a gruff, masculine voice. To this extent, the film succeeds in establishing an entirely counter-cultural representation of male homosexuality. However, the representation falls into what Sinfield (1992) called the 'entrapment model', whereby a representation that attempts to subvert an element of the dominant discourse can end up drawing more attention to the dominant discourse's claims and, in fact, render them potentially more plausible. In this text, Jeff is referred to by one character as 'not what I expected' – she had expected him, as a gay man, to be effeminate; this reminds the viewer that it is, indeed, more culturally plausible for Jeff to have been effeminate; he becomes anomalous. Furthermore, Jeff, for all his masculinity, is still subordinated by his straight teammates at the pub: in one scene, they call, 'G'day, Baxter!' to him, referring to, as Jeff explains, 'Backs to the wall boys – here comes Jeff!' Jeff is still rendered separate from the straight men; he is less than them. This is reinforced when his lover, Greg, is picked on by straight men at work in a different scene: homosexuals are portrayed, no matter how typically masculine, as being easily subordinated by straight men.

New sitcom *Happy Endings* (Casper, 2011) also attempts to construct a masculine gay character in the character of Max Adler. Max is interested in football and drinks beer and is certainly not initially portrayed as feminine. However, the degree to which this deviation from the 'proper gay identity' is pointed out and hammed up by the other characters again aligns with Sinfield's entrapment model: the viewer is constantly reminded that Max *is not like a normal gay; he's different*. Max (and the other characters) doth protest too much. Moreover, Max's masculinity is superficial: there is little evidence of the kind of aggression, assertiveness, decisiveness, strength or courage that might be typified as conventional masculine behaviour; the locus of his masculinity is his beer-drinking and football-watching. And in later episodes, this seems to unravel to some extent: in one episode, when discussing his first date with Grant, Max embodies a chattering neuroticism stereotypically played on screen by teenage girls; and in another, it is revealed that he plays in an all-male Madonna cover band called 'Mandonna'. There is something unstable about the construction of Max's masculinity; it is nowhere near as unproblematic as that of the other male characters like Dave and Brad, and this seems to be simply because he is homosexual.

What remains to be noted here is that masculine behaviour is often problematised and de-legitimised in homosexual men. Clarkson (2006) discusses this

concept with reference to the website [straightacting.com](http://straightacting.com) and the comments left by users of what are referred to as the 'Butch Boards' (p. 192). One member, Mark, expressed his outrage at his identity being not only unrepresented in mainstream discourses, but treated as fraudulent:

It's never enough for some feminine men to simply insist they be respected for who they are. Uh-uh. They also have to INSIST that any guy who's into guys is secretly JUST LIKE THEM!!! (The term "straight-acting" contains the word "acting" and therefore means you're being phony ... That's an intelligent argument?) Give me a friggin' break. These are the same bozos who want us to "celebrate diversity," as long as said "diversity" doesn't include everyday Joe-types." ... (Clarkson, 2006, p. 192; emphasis in original)

Despite Mark's invective, he correctly notes the problematic nature of the term 'straight-acting' to describe masculine homosexuals: it is perceived as deceitful, it entrenches the conflation of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, and it reifies male-male sexual desire as innately feminine. The term is often, justifiably, deconstructed and problematised (Payne, 2007; Clarkson, 2006; Eguchi, 2011) and especially so in the gay media (Leighton, 2012); however, frequently 'straight-acting' is rendered as base and the much more complex meaning it carries – the masculine homosexual – is dismissed and rendered as base along with it, rather than being explored further.

Clarkson (2006) goes on to discuss the attitudes raised by the users of the Butch Boards in more detail, but ultimately ends up problematising them, arguing that in identifying with a typically 'working-class masculinity' (p. 204), they are in some way representing a 'new and insidious type of internalized homophobia' (p. 204) and are illustrating 'the pervasive ideological dominance of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.' (p. 204) Clarkson's assessment is a little simplistic, for it asserts that a rejection of the feminine is the same as a rejection of homosexual orientation. This is not what the men of [straightacting.com](http://straightacting.com) appear to embody. Rather, they mount a significant challenge to existing gender discourse, purporting to extend the bounds of hegemonic masculinity to men who perform masculinity, regardless of the gender of their sexual object choice. Furthermore, the comment left by Mark, quoted above, does not expressly seek to subjugate effeminate men or women (although the invective is

problematic); rather, he is arguing that they might coexist with hegemonically masculine homosexuals. The home page of straightacting.com even states, 'Society has stereotyped homosexual men as being feminine. Some are. Some aren't. ... Does being more "Straight Acting" than feminine make you a better person? NO!' ("Welcome to Straight Acting.com", n.d.). Clarkson does not take this position into account or take it further and consider whether hegemonic masculinity could be broadened by the proliferation of these men's identities and involve simply the masculine self-identification of men, rather than the privileging of this identity over all others. The 'macho homo' is instead problematised as anti-woman, anti-effeminate gay men, and ultimately harbouring internalised homophobia.

In some feminist and queer theorist frameworks, hegemonically masculine behaviour is often problematised for men in general, regardless of sexuality, and de-legitimised specifically for homosexual men. Philaretou and Allen (2001) assert that 'abiding by the premises of traditional masculinity may prove hazardous to men's physical and psychological health' (p. 301), thereby rendering traditional masculinity a problem. Taywaditep (2002) argues quite overtly that effeminate behaviour is to some degree more intrinsic to homosexual men than it is to heterosexual men, essentialising the feminisation of the homosexual and arguing that, rather than being innately masculine, these homosexual men 'defeminize' themselves in order to fit in. Taywaditep further argues that 'defeminized men's ongoing preoccupation with "fitting in" may unfortunately come with a price, as they have associated their own and other gay men's gender nonconformity with discomfort and disapproval' (2002, p. 19). In other words, conventional masculinity for homosexual males is de-legitimised, as it is an attempt to 'fit in' and is denying what Taywaditep alleges is their true 'feminised' nature. This is disingenuous for any theorist arguing from the standpoint that gender is performative: if both masculinity and femininity are performative in nature, then effeminate gays are simply performing femininity in the same way that masculine homosexuals are performing masculinity. Instead, Taywaditep and many others essentialise homosexual men's feminine performance as 'true' and their masculine performance as 'fake'. Eguchi (2011) postulates that 'the discourse of straight-acting produces and reproduces anti-femininity and homophobia ... [feminine gay men] are perceived as if they perform like "women", spurring straight-acting gay men to have negative attitudes toward gay feminine men' (p. 38); homosexual masculinity is again a problem. Finally, Sánchez and others (2010, 2012) have published several studies

arguing that homosexual men who identify themselves as masculine, or whose masculinity is important to their identity, will more likely experience negative feelings about being gay and internalised homophobia. These studies tend to take the same approach as Taywaditep (2002), asserting an immanent femininity in homosexual men and claiming that the rejection of this nature, and the appeal to masculinity, cause self-loathing and internalised homophobia.

### **The Macho Homo: From Porn to *Androphilia***

The ‘macho homo’ is scarcely represented in popular media due, I argue, to the threat it poses to existing popular discourses on sexuality and gender. The macho homo subverts the heterosexual matrix and thus undermines patriarchal gender discourses. In his discussion of how rurality culturally connotes masculinity, and the urban connotes femininity, Bell (2000) posited that ‘the stories of gay men born, raised and living in rural areas’ are often ignored in mainstream discourses (p. 548): I would argue that an affiliation between homosexuality and a signifier of masculinity poses a threat to patriarchy, and thus this identity is invisibilised. Simultaneously, popular media discourses and several theorists (Eguchi, 2011; Philaretou and Allen, 2001; Taywaditep, 2002) purporting a feminist or queer theorist approach, as displayed above, tend to problematise and de-legitimise the macho homo as experiencing ‘internalised homophobia’ or being inherently anti-female. Nonetheless, the macho homo has been able to assert himself and enter the discourse through the proliferation of the Internet.

There are many internet sites now which either act as social hubs for macho homos or simply function to legitimise their existence. The aforementioned straightacting.com and its ‘Butch Boards’ are a fine example of this, featuring same-sex attracted men who reclaim a masculine identity, notably without necessarily hierarchically privileging it over other identities (“Welcome to Straight Acting.com”, n.d.). Regularguys.org is another prominent example: in its mission statement, it describes itself as ‘a fraternal/social group for gay and bisexual men who are comfortable identifying with traditional notions of masculinity, who enjoy masculine/non-gay-stream activities and who seek an alternative to the ways gay men usually socialize’ (“Regular Guys”, n.d.). The emphasis is on male bonding, the fostering of fraternity and camaraderie, and athletic, sporting and physical pursuits: in short, hegemonic masculinity embodied by homosexual men. Realjock.com is another

node for this activity: an online hub for self-identified gay jocks, it lies at the nexus of sport and fitness discussions and online dating (“Real Jock: Gay Fitness, Health and Life”, n.d.).

Indeed, the online gay dating world is certainly worthy of mentioning here: as noted by Ward (2008), many men advertising for sex with men express not only their interest in a masculine partner but also their own masculine identity. This is a common feature in online dating profiles on sites such as Manhunt, Grindr and many others (“Manhunt”; n.d.; “Grindr”; n.d.). Smartphone applications (apps) have even been set up purely for masculine looking, and acting, men. Scruff is the most prominent example, with close to 200,000 likes on its Facebook page (“Scruff”, n.d.). Its creators describe the typical Scruff user as ‘many things: servicemen, firefighters, students, gamers, and designers just to name a few. Some scruff guys are bears, some scruff guys are jocks, some scruff guys are just guys’ (“Scruff”, n.d.). The emphasis is on down-to-earth, non-stereotypically gay, masculine men, although the Facebook page is not as focused on traditional masculinity as the Scruff users and their personal ads are. Indeed, although crystallised with apps like Scruff, this could be stated about almost all online dating sites and apps for homosexual men: the masculinity of both the man seeking sex/companionship, and the masculinity of whom he seeks, are emphasised; there is little trace of stereotypical femininity.

The Internet is also the vehicle for the proliferation of pornography, either amateur or studio-produced, and including homosexual male pornography that represents the men involved as quintessentially masculine. In fact, beyond the online sphere, pornography is one of the very few media that reifies the macho homo identity, perhaps because the locus of identity is centred on the physical sexual act, something other media are either reluctant or unable to discuss. The sexual act between men in online homosexual pornography is almost universally depicted as hypermasculine, even if the men involved are not necessarily extremely muscular (Morrison, 2004). Moreover, there are many genres within homosexual porn that emphasise the inherent masculinity, and often hypermasculinity, of men who have sex with men: there are jocks, bears, leathermen, and daddies, to name just a few. These men are represented as masculine in all hegemonic ways except for (usually) heterosexuality: they are often muscular, dominant, powerful, aggressive, sporty and athletic, physically capable, hairy-chested, deep-voiced, blue-collar men. This paradigm extends to both studio-



produced porn and, significantly, user-generated content on sites like Xtube.com (“Xtube”, n.d.). While masculinity is fetishised in this material, it nonetheless reveals that many homosexual men both identify as hegemonically masculine and seek out the same quality in sexual partners. Another notable trend in online homosexual porn is the concept of the ‘straight’ man who has sex with other men: it is a growing subgenre of homosexual porn, used prominently on sites such as straightfellas.com (“Str8fellas”, n.d.), seducedstraightguys.com (“Seduced Straight Guys”, n.d.), baitbus.com (“Bait Bus”, n.d.) and men.com (“Men.com”, n.d.). What is fetishised in these subjects is arguably not their heterosexuality but the implied masculinity attached to it. Interestingly, the straight man is often subordinated sexually by the homosexual man in these scenes, which, beyond a sexualised context (or perhaps even within it) mounts a challenge to hegemonic masculinity: not only is the homosexual male able to occupy the same hypermasculine space as the straight man, he is able to be the ‘alpha male’, with the straight man occupying a ‘beta’ role. The implications of this paradigm in terms of social, rather than sexual, power structures are enormous. What if homosexual men were culturally viewed as equally as masculine/powerful as heterosexual men? What if men could be seen as men, regardless of sexuality? What if the paragon of hegemonic masculinity were a macho homo?

Beyond pornography, it is difficult to find texts that deal with the idea of homosexual men being hegemonically masculine in a way that is visible, legitimised and non-problematised. *Androphilia: Rejecting the gay identity, reclaiming masculinity*, a manifesto written by Jack Malebranche, is perhaps the only solid example to date which approaches this new frontier. Malebranche is another real-life example of a macho homo, identifying with a distinctly blue-collar masculinity. He vehemently rejects the gay culture, which he claims ‘embraces and promotes effeminacy’ (2007, p. 19), adding that this ‘has actually fostered the perception of a mutually exclusive relationship between masculinity and same-sex desire’ (p. 19). He makes reference to the Sacred Band of Thebes, an ancient Greek band of warriors composed of 150 male couples: although cautious not to over-romanticise the idea, Malebranche points out the way in which men who had sex with men have, in the past, to some degree occupied the hegemonic masculine space, being respected and thoroughly accomplished warriors (2007, p. 54). Malebranche’s work is notable: while not a peer-reviewed academic source, it serves as a good case study – a more in-depth exploration than what is offered by the men on forums and online social groups. Key to Malebranche’s philosophy is the

rejection of the existing signifiers of male homosexuality; he states, 'I am not gay. I am a man who loves men, and I'm comfortable with that' (p. 17). He adds that 'the word *gay* connotes so much more than same-sex desire' (Malebranche, 2007, p. 18). A similar point was made by Murphy (2011), who, in discussing the usage of the term 'faggot', argued:

"faggot" designates any effeminate male, regardless of sexual orientation, sexual desires, or sexual practices (Pascoe 2005; Smith 1998). According to this understanding, the major distinction between a real man and a "faggot" is not *sexual orientation* ... but *gender* (masculinity or femininity). (Murphy, 2011, p. 174).

Malebranche thus proposes the rejection of existing signifiers of male homosexuality for masculine homosexuals, and for them to be replaced with more accurate etymology. He advocates the use of 'homosexual' as an accurate term, shortening it to 'homo', perhaps to reduce its clinical connotations. 'Homo' is not used as derogatory in this context. Moreover, Malebranche proposes the term 'androphile' as a better word for men who have sex with men:

The prefix *andro* means male; it comes from the Greek word *anêr*, which describes an adult male in the prime of his life. ... I'm using *androphilia* here to describe a sexual love and appreciation for men as it is experienced by males. (Malebranche, 2007, p. 22)

While it is a bold proposal, it is problematic. It could be read as potentially more clinical than 'homosexual', even pathologising, which Malebranche does acknowledge: 'the more common usage of *philia* implies an unusual, sexual love' (2007, p. 22). Certainly this is the existing cultural association, and potentially rendering homosexual desire as a fetish or unusual sexual taste would be counterproductive. Malebranche proposes 'andro' as a slang replacement, arguing that homosexual men often 'use the word *gay* simply because it's easy to say' and that '*androphile* and *androphilic* are admittedly a bit clunky in conversation' (2007, p. 28). This still does not, however, resolve the problematic nature of the term *androphile*. Nonetheless, despite its etymological problems, Malebranche's manifesto serves as a call for a rethinking of the cultural and semiotic relationship between masculinity and homosexuality.

As many others have demonstrated above, many homosexual men (it is currently impossible to know how many) are just as typically masculine as heterosexual men. Moreover, these men identify strongly with, and desire to be a part of, hegemonic masculinity. The unusual, perpetually ‘othered’ space occupied by masculine homosexual men, and their dissatisfaction and psychological discomfort with this space, makes a case for a reframing of male homosexuality.

### **Conclusion: Toward a Masculist Reframing of Male Homosexuality**

Within the existing discourses on gender and sexuality, it is my assertion that reconciling hegemonic masculinity and homosexuality is impossible. As long as patriarchal discourses subordinate and render abject male homosexuality, the macho homo will never occupy the same space as the heterosexual male. Similarly, as shown above, the mainstream media in the west continues to propagate flawed conclusions about homosexual men. There is no popular, discursive space in which the macho homo is visible and represented as legitimate and unproblematic.

Robinson (1994) conceptualised ‘masculism’ as ‘the positive counterpart to feminism: a movement dedicated to the liberation of men from patriarchal gender programming’ (p. 26); in other words, part of the feminist movement. This ideology applies to online hubs like The Good Men Project (“The Good Men Project”, n.d.), where most writers identify themselves as feminists or male feminists. Conversely, Dupuis-Déri (2009) argued that the term ‘*masculinisme*’ (the French word for masculism) referred to a movement by and for men *against feminism*, stating: ‘Le terme « masculinisme » peut aussi désigner un mouvement par et pour les hommes, se mobilisant contre le féminisme’ (‘The term ‘masculism’ could also refer to a movement by and for men, mobilising itself against feminism’; my translation) (p. 98). Dupuis-Déri’s definition describes a similar movement to that of the Men’s Right’s Activists, who are usually expressly anti-feminist and, to some extent or another, advocate a return to patriarchal systems: online movements such as A Voice for Men (“A Voice for Men”, n.d.) and The Spearhead (“The Spearhead”, n.d.) seem to fit with this definition.

The masculism I propose here is neither of the above. Masculism, as I view it, could operate on what is often referred to, despite being a misappropriation, as a

Hegelian dialectic (Mueller, 1958), whereby traditional patriarchal models would be considered the *thesis*, contemporary popular media discourses purporting to be feminist or queer theorist the *antithesis*, and masculism the *synthesis*. This is necessary because neither the thesis nor antithesis are able to advance the rights and identities of the masculine homosexual without destabilising themselves. This recuperated masculist space would accept both masculinity and homosexuality as non-mutually exclusive concepts. It would privilege no particular gender identity but allow the de-problematised expression of both masculinity and femininity for both men and women in an egalitarian ideological framework.

The function of this model would, of course, be extended beyond the plight of the macho homo – he simply acts as a faultline through which the need for this new model reveals itself – and apply to all men (and women). Many have demonstrated that in the current pluralised discourse of patriarchy and popular media’s version of feminism, men (as much as women) are constantly the subject of negative representations in popular media (as ‘boofheads’ or violent oppressors) and often, outright misandry (MacNamara, 2004; Nathanson & Young, 2001; Barlow, 2004); moreover, Benatar argues in *The Second Sexism* (2012) that institutionalised sexism against men is rife in western cultures and is often completely ignored by the dominant discourse on gender. What has been often missed is that misandry, sexism against men and negative representations of men in popular media do not just impact heterosexual men: they also negatively impact masculine homosexual men who identify with this hegemonically masculine representation. Thus, masculism would challenge the patriarchal representations of men that are problematic, such as men being misogynist, homophobic, excluding homosexual men from masculinity, and devaluing women and non-hegemonically masculine men. Simultaneously, masculism would challenge the representations of men by ostensibly or purportedly feminist popular media that are problematic, such as representing men as inferior, stupid, incapable, dangerous, violent, and immanent oppressors (MacNamara, 2004; Nathanson & Young, 2001). These representations are perhaps doubly problematic as, in suggesting homosexual men accept that they are separate from hegemonic masculinity and should identify with the feminine, and in conflating masculine agency with patriarchal oppression, they create a certain level of cognitive dissonance for these men: how can I be the thing I am opposed to? Do I become something else if I oppose patriarchy? How can I be masculine when the main representation of masculinity, as patriarchal, is derided? These discourses

serve to divorce men, to an extent, from their own masculine identity, a point alluded to by Stanley (2006) who argued that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, '[men] are told what not to be (oppressors) but given no option of what to be. How does a man perform white heterosexual masculinity and not be oppressive?' (p. 239). Although referring to heterosexual men, Stanley's point remains salient for homosexual men, too: a clear, non-problematised masculinity has not yet entered popular discourses. Thus, in this recuperated masculism, men, including homosexual men, could assert their rights and identities without adhering to the problematic cultural programming provided to men by patriarchal and purportedly feminist discourses.

Within this masculist framework, it may be possible that macho homos would no longer feel forced to choose which part of their identity to psychically amputate: their sexuality or their masculinity. It may, in fact, become less traumatic for such men to come to terms with their sexuality if their gender is no longer brought into question; as discussed above, and as Allen and Oleson (1999) demonstrated, homosexual men being stereotyped as lacking masculinity 'showed significant positive correlations with shame' (p. 38). The proliferation of this identity could offer these men role models in popular media and eliminate the cognitive dissonance and invisibility of being a macho homo. A masculine identity would be open to them and they would not feel interpolated into a feminine role against their own volition. This may be especially important for men struggling to come to terms with their sexuality. It may even be possible that the broadening of hegemonic masculinity to incorporate homosexual men performing masculinity may, perhaps, serve to temper homophobia in that the establishment of a masculist reframing of male homosexuality would offer masculine homosexual men an affirmative, legitimised space within hegemonic masculinity.

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