



Moral Panic

Male Studies and the Spectre of Denial

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The absence of male studies programs in Canada is both a result of and clear evidence that political correctness along with moral panic and gender feminism or third wave feminism have a grip on academe, creating an adversarial schism. Over the last three decades, this has marginalized a more inclusive, multi-perspective “male studies” discipline to the periphery of academe. It has resulted in mainly feminist and pro-feminist men’s studies programs and research that focus on men as primarily being violent victimizers, as well as secondary and disengaged parents. Male studies programs and a journal are necessary to reveal the “lived male experience.”



In late 1989, I began to research men’s movements, ranging from pro-feminist to mythopoetic, father’s rights and men’s rights paradigms. At the time there were no men’s studies or male studies programs in Canada. It was with a graduate student’s aspiring enthusiasm, ignorance, and faulty arrogance that I approached the topic of men with an open mind and commitment to the concept of masculinity and the various disciplines’ representations of ‘maleness’. In the United States and elsewhere, most

men's studies programs were often associated with feminist or pro-feminist perspectives and had an otherwise narrow approach to men's experiences. An inclusive study of the male experience seemed to be missing and a course on the topic would provide an opportunity for it to be found.

My research on fathers and teaching a course about men's movements allowed me to consider varied approaches beyond pro-feminist perspectives on masculinity. Male studies could arguably offer broader perspectives to enhance the understanding of men's experiences from beyond a biological model to include historical, sociological, psychological, and interdisciplinary cultural viewpoints.

A perspective based on "male lived experience" has been a major consideration of my research on separated and divorced fathers (Kenedy, 2004; 2006). I observed that these fathers had a particular "situational identity" developed through their specific lived experiences of often being non-custodial fathers. This gave them a particular view of non-custodial fatherhood, which arguably could only be gained through this unique experience. The identity was an ironic social disposition of 'maleness' in relation to parental roles. In that situation, men experience the role of father as a secondary parent, usually being told they are not capable of parenting in light of feminist and pro-feminist ideological perspectives.

There is a continued absence of male studies programs in Canada (Farr, 2010; Cribb, 2010). I suggest this is the result of a moral panic (Fekete, 1995) and what Sommers (1995) refers to as gender feminism. The intersection of gender feminism and a moral panic has had a detrimental effect on academe, actively promoting an adversarial schism in the legitimate and valid dialogue on maleness. Over the last three decades, this has marginalized what could be seen as more inclusive multi-perspective "male studies" to the periphery of academe which has resulted in mainly feminist and pro-feminist interpretations of masculinity, men's studies programs and research, primarily focused on men as being violent and victimizing, as well as secondary and disengaged parents. I will present a working conception of male studies in view of my experience of teaching and research on men. Contextualizing male studies as the study of men's experience compared to men's studies as the study of pro-feminist masculinity, I outline the seminal opportunity to launch a male studies program and an accompanying journal.

Teaching a Men's Movements Course in the 1990s

In 1990 it was time to create, launch, and teach my first course as a graduate student at York University entitled *Men's Movements: Re-examining Masculinity*, which considered masculinity from varying "male lived experiences." The course, as taught between 1991 and 1997, was designed as a first year seminar with a maximum of 20 students. My approach to studying men and masculinity was to look at it from the point of view of all men's movements, in terms of activism and policies, while at the same time working to develop new perspectives on men and masculinity. The purpose of the course was to critically examine the strengths, challenges, and inadequacies of each movement's perspectives and policies on masculinity. Usually, there were more



women than men enrolled in the course, with ages ranging from 19 to students in their mid-40s. Each year I began by asking the students why they were taking the course. The women noted they were most interested in learning more about the men in their lives, specifically mentioning intimates, male friends, and their fathers. The young men were not often as clear about why they decided to enrol, whereas the mature male students wanted to learn more about masculinity in terms of their father's influence, violence, masculine culture and sports, or just understand their emotions and masculine roles.

Based on levels of participation, engagement with the material through assignments, and other criteria, it was clear that the women and mature males seemed to benefit from the seminar discussions. Young men, toward the later instruction period, began to think about their masculinity, question issues related to violence and sports, as well as issues concerning their fathers (especially when absent due to divorce). Most surprising was the tendency of women and the mature males to consistently question gender issues, masculinity, and patriarchy, especially when pro-feminist issues were being discussed. The young men in the course were usually quiet and disengaged. Even when guest speakers active in the mythopoetic, pro-feminist, fathers' rights, and men's rights movements presented their positions on various issues related to masculinity, it was the women and mature male students who asked the activists questions and wanted to know more.

Throughout the years of teaching the course, interest developed amongst graduate students studying issues related to masculinity who often asked to sit in on the course and learn about the course materials. Faculty and graduate students within and from outside the university contacted me about the course. It was apparent that the humanities and social science students were interested in approaching masculinity from multiple perspectives. Most students, researchers, and faculty commented on the importance of studying both men and women and how little research there was on men and masculinity.

I quickly realized that a perspective that encompasses the essential aspects of the male experience was missing. All men's movements and their accompanying perspectives could be used as springboards for accounting for the male experience, but they did have clear limitations. A male studies approach that examines maleness and masculinity from varied theoretical and methodological perspectives was necessary. This would include developing a male perspective or viewpoint that includes and goes beyond feminist and pro-feminist perspectives in order to create a more varied understanding of being male and notions of masculinity. As Urschel (1999) points out, male studies courses are designed to develop the perspectives and voices of men.

It has been over 16 years since Fekete (1995) and Sommers (1995) began to scrutinize the rise of political correctness in the 1980s and how academe has become a less open and more censored environment spurring on what Fekete (1995) refers to as a "moral panic." Political correctness has also encouraged "gender feminists" or what I refer to as "third wave feminists" to marginalize and often accuse those involved with male studies of being anti-feminist, misogynists, or anti-female. Studying men, boys, fathers, and general aspects of masculinity has been relegated to the periphery of acad-

eme and is taken up only if study favours the feminist or pro-feminist perspective for explaining maleness. The result has been a silencing of both men and boys who do not conform to the will of gender feminists.

Male studies is essential and should include a range of perspectives on boyhood and childhood, gender relations, heterosexual and gay men, men and racism, as well as the realization in society of maleness and femaleness. These areas can be navigated using multiple frameworks that permit the understanding of the male experience. The expression of maleness needs to transcend the feminist and pro-feminist polemicist approach in order to develop a specific male perspective. Most important, it is necessary to identify the “male experience” with studies centred on stereotyped male roles: boys in their life course through high school and post-secondary education, misandry, fathers, social justice, violence, tolerance, and gay and certain race-related male stereotypes. Such studies will clarify the range of perspectives on these issues.

Little has changed in terms of men’s or male’s studies since the 1990s. In Canada, there are few courses explicitly about men being taught at universities that consider men and masculinity from multiple perspectives of “male lived experience”. Most, if not all, men’s studies programs in the United States and internationally focus on a feminist or pro-feminist theoretical and methodological framework that often distorts other perspectives.

TOWARDS A MALE STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

Sommers (1995) notes that gender feminists have “divisive view[s] . . . and believe we are in a gender war” (p.16). She is careful, as I also want to be, to not include what she calls “equality feminists” and what I refer to as “second wave feminists,” but only those who have an ideological agenda prone to using divisive tactics and not bridging the gender divide through encouraging male studies and/or gender studies using a variety of frameworks. To contextualize the problem, it is important to consider the waves of feminism and the problematic third wave. I will first provide a brief synopsis of the various feminist waves and their accompanying perspectives.

The first wave of feminism evolved over centuries. This wave strived for basic equality in terms of women being recognized as “persons,” having voting rights, property rights, and related recognition. Suffragettes of the 19th and 20th century challenged the status quo. The second wave pushed again for more complete equality in the 1960s. This wave consisted mainly of liberal feminists concerned with the civil and equal rights movements in the United States and elsewhere. Their main causes were employment equity, equal and balanced responsibilities in the family, and issues related to the rights of women. The second wave saw men as partners and invited them to take on more equal roles at work and in the home, in childcare, and in other issues such as confronting spousal abuse. Balance and equality between men and women were their main goals.

An outcrop of the second wave was radical Marxist-socialist feminism. This ideology took hold and began co-opting the entire feminist movement in the late 1970s (connected to the NOW 12th Annual Convention in 1978), morphing into the third wave of feminism. Fekete (1995) notes that bio-feminism “has much to answer for, for hijacking



the discourse of women's liberation" (p. 14). The mix of political correctness and moral panic associated with "biofeminism," as well as gender feminism, created a "perfect storm" that relegated areas such as male studies to the periphery of academe.

Aspects of post-modernism nurtured a climate where interpretation and multiple realities became the foundation of third-wave feminism. Post-modernism has ignored the necessary challenging of the negative view of male inadequacy and exposing the effects of third-wave feminism on men. It "rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge" (Harrington, 2005, p. 326). This led to a shift on the political left from looking at the focus on production and property to a focus on identity. Feminism in relation to post-modernism is based on relativity in terms of "the view that any one person's point of view is as good as another's, or anything goes" (Harrington, 2005, p. 327). Fekete (1995) sees post-modernism as being connected to the "sexual politics of storytelling" (p. 11-12).

Third-wave feminism is clearly post-modern in terms of focusing more on ideologically-based social constructionism. The third wave seems to move away from facts to what appears to be interpretation. Fekete (1995) notes that "everyone wants to tell a story." His book is "at odds with the sexual politics of storytelling" (pp. 11-12). I would argue that third-wave feminism has moved away from gaining equality and overall equity issues that were the goal of first-wave feminist suffragettes and second-wave feminists influenced by the civil rights movement.

It is this third wave of feminism that dominates academe and has had a detrimental effect on establishing male studies programs. While the third wave supports men's studies, it blocks any potential for mounting male studies courses and opposes the possibility of creating male studies. The third wave is mainly interested in supporting pro-feminist curriculum and related research. In short, pro-feminists study males from a feminist perspective that does not account for the lived "male experience," thus offering a limited perspective on masculinity.

TEACHING MALE STUDIES

There are various approaches to men's studies ranging from pro-feminist and mythopoetic, to men's rights and father's rights. August's (1982) experience of teaching men's issues is close to my own, while I find Hearn's (1989) perspective restricted to a pro-feminist view. Most of the literature pertaining to men's studies seems to be more exclusive and limited to an anti-male, politically correct, morally panicked perspective. While there have been various proposals for male studies programs that outline overall structures and potential courses (Tomasson, 1972), these programs still do not exist at North American universities.

Hearn (1989) found the term "men's studies" to be "unacceptable for several reasons: it appears to be politically neutral; it may lend itself to incorporation and take-over by men, with no pro-feminist commitment" (p. 671). Hearn reviews various primarily pro-feminist men's texts that take a viewpoint that begins and ends with focusing "on the effects of male power on women and young people" and "men as oppressor" (p.

686). Male studies can include a pro-feminist perspective, but there needs to be a more multidimensional and inclusive view of masculinity and being male.

August (1982) moves beyond a feminist analysis of masculinity, through sharing his experiences with teaching male studies and sees the discipline as necessary in order to “extend and re-evaluate our knowledge of men and men’s lives” (August, 1982, p. 584). He points out that though “there were major areas in which men are legally and socially discriminated against [this] was usually greeted [by those in the women’s movement] with incredulity or hostility” (p. 586). The women’s movement is considered by August to be unwilling to do away with stereotyped gender roles of “men-as-oppressors and women-as-victims.” August notes that Herb Goldberg criticized the feminist approach as deconstructive, failing to recognize “how both sexes perpetuated restrictive gender roles and how both could correct the situation” (ibid.). August also notes that in the past he was sympathetic to the feminist cause but realized that feminists “use literature as an instrument to induce male guilt and to rally female anger” (p. 587).

The literature indicates that approaches to studying men vary from pro-feminist and feminist perspectives to more male-centred viewpoints. However, I would argue that male studies should include courses and a journal that considers all men and varying aspects of being male. More specifically, a curriculum that examines maleness using an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach is absent from academe. Concurrently, a specific journal that encourages ideas and research about the area of maleness is also necessary. There needs to be the inclusion of multiple perspectives that work toward explaining maleness, masculinities, and gender in order to work toward a new and more detailed understanding of the male experience. A more reflective view of maleness needs to be developed along with a male studies curriculum which goes beyond the pro-feminist notions of men’s studies is necessary. There needs to be a continuous critique of maleness and notions of masculinity that are theoretically and empirically grounded. A curriculum encompassing male studies has to be able to be open enough to include various disciplines and go beyond ideological constructs of masculinity through comprehensive research and ideas about males.

A comprehensive male studies program examining males and masculinity needs to be broad enough to examine male health, being male in contemporary society, conceptions of masculinity, violence and males, male suicide, a critical analysis of being male in literature and research, men and work, boyhood, and fathering. Male sexuality and sexual orientation have to be considered in terms of gay men’s lives and sexuality as well as gay fatherhood. A multidisciplinary approach to male studies should include courses such as the psychology of men, sociology of men, religious studies and men, the history of masculinity, masculinity and popular culture, as well as other topics related to male studies and masculinity. Finally, courses related to policy and activism such as masculinity and men’s social movements, fatherhood and parenting, male health, and other issues are needed. Overall, there should be the development of theoretical frameworks that conceptualize male studies as well as related methodologies to study males, masculinity, and gender issues. This should be considered in the context of both research related to a journal and the pedagogical aspects of curriculum.



These interrelated elements have to be developed as the core of male studies. Overall, there needs to be room to develop a better understanding of maleness that considers the problems with ideological constructions of masculinity and explores other possibilities of maleness.

SUMMARY

The opposition to male studies initially comes from areas of feminist and pro-feminist men's studies programs that arose in light of the ideology of political correctness, moral panic, and gender feminism. A "perfect storm" has limited the possibility of moving beyond a pro-feminist view of men as being violent, secondary fathers, and exclusively connected to patriarchy, and has resulted in the stagnation of male studies in terms of curriculum and research. It negates the possibility of developing a more comprehensive view of maleness that transcends the limits of a restrictive pro-feminist analysis. I would argue that political correctness has shut down our capacity to think critically about the male experience and develop a more comprehensive approach to studying males and facilitating more research on the topic.

CONCLUSION

Recent accounts in the media have pointed to the absence of male studies programs in Canada and the limited number of such courses in the United States (Farr 2010; Cribb, 2010). While programs exist in the UK and elsewhere, there is often a pro-feminist slant in them that usually does not leave room for other perspectives on maleness.

It is very clear that a journal for male studies is necessary to complement male studies programs. *New Male Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* is committed to being theoretically inclusive and challenging notions of political correctness and its accompanying moral panic. This journal represents a challenge to existing perspectives on maleness and seeks to broaden the literature, research, and theory on the topic. The position statement of the journal notes:

Discussion of gender in the last half century has often been *characterised by a polarisation of the sexes; making it very difficult* to engage with issues of vital importance to healthy interpersonal and social relationships. Gender ideology—and reactions against it—all too often have not only curtailed possibilities of reasoned dialogue, but have sidelined crucial informative evidence and silenced individuals with unpopular views.

NMS recognises the need to pursue a different approach to understanding gender issues and the contemporary experience and roles of males in society; an approach that is:

- open to constructive academic dialogue guided by available evidence of a range

of different academic disciplines, consideration of both men's and women's particular cultural experience and circumstances, and the indispensable contribution both sexes make to the quality and viability of family and community life;

- guided by principles of equity, intellectual integrity, and a view of human experience, society, and ethics that is inseparable from biological, psychological, cultural, economic realities <http://newmalestudies.com/OJS/index.php/nms/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>

It is clear that this journal seeks to present a balanced view of maleness, challenging gender ideology and providing a viable alternative to it. Having complementary goals of creating a male studies program and journal may open the possibility of more expansive views of being maleness and understanding the "males experience" in order to develop an inclusive view in the area of male studies.

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