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men, was greeted with protests organized by a coalition calling itself “U of T Students United Against Sexism.” According to the University of Toronto student newspaper “protestors accused Farrell and the men’s issues awareness movement of misogyny, and of protecting and denying male privilege” (Smeenk, 2012, n.p.).

The event—later condemned in the media by both the University of Toronto Students’ Union and the national student association Canadian Federation of Students—was approved by the University of Toronto’s Office of Student Life. Opposition mostly came from student groups: media reported that between 50 and 100 protestors delayed the event by blocking entrance to the venue. Toronto police officers on horseback, reinforced by campus police, intervened and the talk eventually proceeded (Bredin, 2013; Smeenk, 2012).

The protest, confrontation, and police intervention at University of Toronto—which was caught on video and has since spread widely via YouTube and other forms of social media—coincides with a growing and increasingly active presence on Canadian university campuses of groups affiliated with the Canadian Association For Equality (CAFE). Described by observers as a “men’s rights” advocacy group (Bredin, 2013; Smeenk, 2012), the group’s website (2013) states that it is “committed to achieving equality for all Canadians.” The male focus becomes readily apparent however: the organization’s primary “Men’s Issues Awareness” campaign aims “to engage in consciousness-raising, public education and efforts to change public policy” around areas such as “Boys Crises;” “Men’s Health;” “Family law and Fathers rights;” “Crime and Punishment/Legal Biases against Men;” “Media, Social and Cultural Misandry (hatred and contempt for men),” and “Academic Misandry (e.g. in Gender Studies and Culture Studies programs).”

Although CAFE refers to itself as a national organization its primary presence is in the province of Ontario, where it is based and where it now boasts six campus chapters (University of Toronto, York University, University of Guelph, Carleton University, Trent University, and McGill University in the neighbouring province of Quebec). A seventh group has been seeking recognition at Ryerson University, where the students’ union rejected its application in early March 2013, citing an anti-misogyny policy (R. Diverlus, personal communication, March 20, 2013).

This article offers an exploratory and speculative consideration of the recent spread of the “men’s rights” movement on Canadian university campuses. It argues that the activities of these groups in fact merit closer attention than they have been paid in the academy and especially in masculinities research, particularly given their increasingly transnational presence and networking. Such attention is also important given the shifting socio-political terrain in which they operate and the manner in which these groups often strategically co-opt the language and discourse of feminist theory.

It will be particularly noted that in Canada many of these groups are embedded in university campuses. What is it about institutions of higher education that has created apparently fertile ground for the development and spread of these groups? Has the growth and prominence of women’s studies departments engendered a backlash among faculty embedded in other academic units? Is it the entrenchment in recent decades of equity-based and affirmative action hiring and enrolment policies and scholarships, and the dramatic growth in numbers of female students, which has sparked a backlash? And importantly, how does the emergent focus on masculinities within gender studies and women’s/feminist studies relate to the emergence and activism of “men’s rights” organizations like CAFE?
Paternity of a Movement

There is a well-established and growing body of literature on the role and impact of the “fathers’ rights” movement, particularly in the American and Australian contexts (see, for instance, Dragiewicz, 2008; Flood, 2010; Kaye & Tolmie, 1998a/b). Studies of this phenomenon have begun to expand to encompass consideration of the more recent and broader-based “men’s rights” organizations, which often frame their advocacy work in the guise of equality activism. Dragiewicz (2008) in particular observes the efforts of fathers’ rights groups to push for formal equality measures using “subtle efforts that appropriate liberal equality language and advocate ‘blindness’ of important cultural categories like race and gender” (p. 127). As she elaborates,

Fathers’ rights groups often couch their lobbying in terms of seeking formal equality. The groups argue that language, policy, and funding should be blind to sex and gender differences in women’s and men’s violence against intimates. They suggest that this formal equality is in the interest of justice and fairness. (2008, p. 130)

Much of the literature on the fathers’ rights movement frames that movement in the context of anti-feminist backlash, but also attests to the material impact of this movement on the legal experience of women in the courts and legislative arena, for instance in relation to child custody or violence against women. Significantly, Dragiewicz notes that the complex connections between different movements and agendas is a crucial area for further research and exploration. Fathers’ rights groups, she notes, “are not just talking to themselves. Many complicated connections exist to mainstream fatherhood and marriage promotion initiatives and liberal and conservative politics that are yet to be investigated” (2008, p. 137).

What the present article seeks to do is to add another connection to that list—“men’s rights” groups in institutions of higher education—and to draw attention to the significance of a growing men’s rights movement on Canadian campuses. Sometimes dismissed as fringe groups on the extreme end of feminist backlash, such groups have started to be taken seriously by human rights organizations. By early 2012 the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)—an American civil rights organization that charts hate activity in the United States—had begun following and reporting on the “Men’s Rights Movement” in its regular newsletter updates. SPLC’s attention seems to have been initially attracted by the high-profile 2011 public suicide of Thomas Ball, leader of the Massachusetts-based Fatherhood Coalition, whose self-immolation outside a New Hampshire courthouse SPLC was attributed to “10 years of custody battles, court-ordered counseling and imminent imprisonment for non-payment of child support” resulting from charges of physical violence against his 4-year old daughter (SPLC, 2012). In a “Last Statement” cited on the SPLC website, which was distributed to local media prior to his suicide, Ball called for “war.”

Twenty-five years ago the federal government declared war on men. It is time to see how committed they are to their cause. It is time, boys, to give them a taste of war…. There will be some casualties in this war…. Some killed, some wounded, some captured. Some of them will be theirs. Some of the casualties will be ours. (n.p.)
SPLC newsletters have since provided updates on at least a dozen other “men’s rights movement” websites flagged for the extensive and violent hate messaging they convey.

### Activism in the Academy: “Men’s Rights” Organizing

CAFE’s list of “advisory fellows” features a range of students, faculty, independent researchers, and professionals (from social workers to retired military personnel). They come from throughout Ontario, including faculty drawn from the University of Western Ontario, Trent University, and University of Ottawa. The list extends from outside of Ontario too, with faculty from Brandon University (in Manitoba) and Rutgers University (in the United States). The “fellows” include three women as well. Indeed, a CAFE event at the University of Toronto on March 7, 2013, featured Dr. Janice Fiamengo (professor of English at the University of Ottawa) speaking on the subject “What’s Wrong With Women’s Studies?” Fiamengo’s talk—which the author attended—consisted of a brief critique of the media coverage that had preceded her talk, followed by a critique of two women’s studies course syllabi.

What became particularly evident at the March 7 event was that there are two competing narratives at play in the contemporary “men’s rights movement.” One narrative involves the valorization of a certain idealized construct of historicized masculinity, and is couched in the narrative that traditional forms of virile masculinity have been lost and ought to be regained. In the words of a song which was played at the beginning of Fiamengo’s lecture: “Oh this has gone on long enough / It’s time we learned from the billy goat gruff / Stand our ground, defend our den / It’s time we learned to be men again.”

The other narrative, however, speaks to a perceived suppression of men’s ability to transcend the very gender role stereotype which the first narrative idealizes. This second narrative is informed by a critique of child and family law which, men’s rights advocates argue, is biased against men in custody battles and thereby prevents men from playing a nurturing parental role in their children’s lives (CAFE’s board of advisory fellows includes representatives of the National Shared Parenting Association and Fathers’ Resources International). At the March 7 Fiamengo lecture two male speakers rose during the question period and described, with quavering voices, how the courts had prevented or had tried to prevent them from having access to their children and playing a nurturing, fatherly role in their children’s lives. Another female speaker described the dissonance she felt growing up without a father in her life following the separation of her parents when she

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2 Although the focus of this article is on the two extremely prevalent narratives, CAFE’s material is not confined to them: much of their media and policy work appears to reflect a fairly inchoate and seemingly contradictory assortment of protest positions. A quick scan through the site’s blog demonstrates the group’s complaints about men being barred from breastfeeding support groups, suggestions that the fact society supports single mothers at the expense of fathers drives men into sex work, and charges that media use harsher language in referring to women’s underrepresentation in male-dominated fields (i.e., engineering) than it does to men’s underrepresentation in female-dominated fields (i.e., childcare workers).
was very young. The motif of the nurturing, caring male who has been deprived of the opportunity to express this sensitive side of his nature surfaces in relation to other political struggles as well. One CAFE pamphlet states that “Men have played important roles in projecting a benevolent and compassionate masculinity into both the human rights and environmental discourses” (CAFE, 2013, n.p.).

What is interesting is that these two narratives co-exist so easily in the men’s rights movement. On the one hand there is the nostalgia for a virile and sexualized masculinity hearkening back to an earlier era. On the other hand is the discourse of the modern, counter-hegemonic, sensitive, caring man who has been deprived of the opportunity to be a father.

Yet the smooth co-existence of these two narratives is perhaps not so surprising given that they both entail a backlash against perceived loss of privilege. Forms of privilege—physical strength, breadwinner roles, fatherhood roles, uniquely enjoyed by men—are recognized in men’s rights literature as being uniquely masculine (if not as forms of privilege), and the loss of unique status is what links both narratives. Indeed, some scholars (Donaldson, 1993) might argue that these narratives—like other apparent juxtapositions of dominant/hegemonic and subordinated/non-hegemonic behaviors, traditions and practices—in fact both constitute forms of hegemony (Donaldson suggests it is difficult to discern any expression of masculinity that is not hegemonic).

Submerged is the fact that the unique status and identity whose renewal is sought in each of the two narratives of masculinity was a status accompanied by profound dimensions of privilege. Stripped of its relational power it is lamented as the loss or suppression of a unique form of identity: the masculine “heroic;” the “nurturing” father. One is left wondering precisely how “nurturing” a role such fathers would play, however. At the March 7 Fiamengo lecture, one speaker who described his custody battles during the question period asserted that it was important for him to play a fatherly role in the lives of his daughters in order to prevent them from growing up “with a sense of entitlement.”

Nurturing, indeed.

**Advocacy and Allies**

There is a critical engagement here surrounding the role of allies, and it too forms part of the discourse around loss of status. The concept and role of “allies” in identity-based social justice movements have been articulated and developed extensively in both academic literature and activist theory, particularly from the perspective of feminist, anti-racist, queer rights and critical disabilities theory. What is interesting here is not merely the adoption of this concept by men’s rights groups, but the way in which it is deployed. Whereas use of the concept in, for example, feminist scholarship has focused on its utility in establishing a boundary between an identity group and those who support it (without sharing in that identity), it has been deployed by men’s rights activists as an argument for the removal of boundaries: for the co-mingling of identities on a basis of formal equality.

The message expressed in events and literature such as those endorsed and produced by CAFE is that allies have played a key role in movements for empowerment of marginalized groups, but where many feminist theorists would argue that allies must inevitably surrender ownership of a liberation movement to those whose liberation is being sought, the men’s rights discourse suggests that such ex-
clusion is unfair and unjust. “A growing number of heterosexual men are playing a central role in pushing LGBTQ rights,” states one CAFE pamphlet. “Without allies, no movement can attain the critical mass to stir the political cauldron” (CAFE, 2013) The resentment of the “spurned ally” is palpable here, marking an appropriation and nuanced redefinition. Equally interesting is the implied message that the “men” who are the subject of the pamphlet are heterosexual men: by highlighting the role of heterosexual male allies, the pamphlet is implicitly suggesting that gay males are not among the subjects toward whom the pamphlet is directed. The men’s rights movement, then, encodes a male identity which is inherently heterosexual as well.

This point—rendered implicitly in the language of CAFE material—is a vital one. Perceived loss of patriarchal identity intersects with other tropes of sexuality, citizenship, class, race and nation in the narratives of the men’s rights movement, and the vehicle through which this is accomplished is in many cases the movement’s critique of feminist theory, which CAFE’s website refers to as “academic misandry.” Very vividly at the March 7 Fiamengo lecture, feminism is criticized for undermining western culture, while turning a blind eye to the purported inequalities of the Islamic world. There is an implication here that feminism has betrayed western culture.

The focus on reinforcing a particular articulation of “western culture” appears repeatedly. One of CAFE’s advisory fellows runs the Free Thinkers Film Society, which describes its goal as being to promote documentaries and films that celebrate “the values of limited, democratic government, free market economies, equality of opportunity rather than equality of result, and the dignity of the individual, all underscored by a healthy and patriotic respect for Western culture and traditions” (CAFE, 2013, n.p.). One of the “Men’s Rights Movement” websites tracked by the Southern Poverty Law Center—Alcuin—describes itself as promoting “The Intellectual Renaissance of the Western Tradition.” The association between a sense of loss of men’s power, and the loss of a “western tradition” is a recurrent theme.

The focus on feminism’s purported betrayal of western culture is further underscored by the depiction of “academic feminism” as being critical of the enlightenment tradition with its emphasis on notions of rationality, logic, and truth. While really it is postmodernism that is being critiqued, labeling it as “academic feminism”—as repeatedly occurred during Fiamengo’s lecture—allows for it to be depicted as “irrational” and “emotional.” What is subtly ironic is that men’s rights advocates ground their criticism in a claim that feminists are irrational and emotional—charges women have faced from men for centuries.

WRESTLING WITH CONCEPTS: PATRIARCHY, MISOGYNY AND THE TRANSNATIONAL

There’s a transnational dimension to the men’s rights movement as well. Paul Elam, editor of the United States-based organization “A Voice For Men,” has offered regular commentary on the Toronto events, urging his American readers to engage in the Canadian debates and featuring photos and profiles of Toronto-based feminist activists on his site under the label “bigots” (material distributed by protestors at the March 7 CAFE event stated that several protestors had elected to wear masks due to the possibility of their being photographed and targeted on American websites). Indeed, the University of Toronto student newspaper The Varsity reported in an article on January 14, 2013, that
a website called “A Voice for Men” has singled out several female protestors who were among the approximately 100 people who disrupted Farrell’s lecture in November. Three students, including former UTSU president Danielle Sandhu, have been the subject of vitriolic blog posts. The group has also added two students to an online registry hosted on register-her.com, which publishes the names of women it labels variously as “bigots” and “false rape accusers. (Bredin, 2013, n.p.)

Jeff Hearn usefully anticipated and identified the transnationalization of patriarchal relations in his development of the concept of transpatriarchy. The term patriarchy has, of course, come under considerable challenge in recent decades, most often under charges that it is too analytically vague a concept to use in academic analysis. Yet the distancing of feminist theory and scholarship from the concept in recent years has been neither unchallenged, nor complete. Cannella and Perez (2012) highlight the growing prevalence of “recent scholars who call for the need to resurrect examinations of patriarchy in contemporary analyses of power (Hunnicutt, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988), as well as those who remind us that feminisms have been the only successful perspectives from which to challenge the variety of forms of patriarchy and take action” (p. 284). In their case, it is their study of violent sexual abuse on university campuses which leads them to this position. They find the resurgence of patriarchy evident in personally profound ways in the university environment. Here, they find growing evidence of

the neoliberal patriarchal structure that is increasingly foundational to academia, or the White male dominance that controls everything from university administrations to publications, or the ways that capitalism is facilitating this reinscription of patriarchy, even to the point of violence. Impositions of patriarchy within academia are not always directly physical or sexual … however, daily impositions of intellectual and emotional oppression can result in a form of violence over mind (and even body) in the long run. I think of so much within the neoliberal university that I have experienced or that others have had to endure that have just that effect. (Cannella & Perez, 2012, p. 280)

What is it about university campuses that render them susceptible to manifestations of patriarchal behaviour? Cannella and Perez (2012) suggest it lies in the institutionalized practices of administration, knowledge legitimation and models of scholarship which subtly lend themselves to a perpetuation of patriarchal tendencies. We are, they suggest, “broadly facing reinscriptions of particular forms of dominant knowledge in neoliberal academic environments today as attempts to discredit women’s, gender, and ethnic studies are on the rise” (p. 280).

And yet in this process debate has been fraught over the sustained utility of the term “patriarchy.” As Hunnicutt explains,

Prior attempts at theorizing the link between patriarchy and violence against women have been criticized for at least five reasons: (a) The concept simplifies power relations; (b) the term patriarchy implies a “false universalism”; (c) the ways in which the concept of patriarchy has been employed have ignored differences among men, casting men instead as a singular group; (d)
a theory of patriarchy cannot account for violence by women or men against men; and finally, (e) this concept cannot help us understand why only a few men use violence against women in societies characterized as patriarchal. (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 554)

Macleod, in a sharp and insightful intervention in the debate (2007), presents three important points. First, she argues that there are dangers in shifting from an analysis of patriarchy to an analysis of masculinities.

While feminists have, to some extent, welcomed pro-feminist masculinities studies, concerns have also been raised. Commenting on pro-feminist masculinities studies and schooling in the United Kingdom, Skelton (1998) asserts that some of it sidesteps feminist concerns at the same time as paying lip-service to them. She questions the extent to which masculinities studies in this field (schooling) complements and informs feminist strategies for change. Robinson (2003) argues that certain forms of feminism, in particular radical feminism, have been caricatured and misrepresented. Nystrom (2002) posits that masculinities studies may make it seem that men and women are equally victimized. Furthermore, men do not necessarily rebel against patriarchal demands for the same reasons that women do. The victories in these rebellions may not be victories for women as well. (Macleod 2007, p. 6)

Second, she argues that the conceptualization of “patriarchy” which early feminists presented in fact already contained the core essence of contemporary masculinities studies—that masculinity is expressed in different ways and leads to the oppression of men by other men as well—and that what is needed is a clearer articulation of the concept of patriarchy in response to the burgeoning field of masculinities studies.

The fact that men may oppress other men was indeed recognised early on by feminists. Millett (1970, cited in Bryson, 1999) in her early exposition of the concept of patriarchy stated that the principles of patriarchy are twofold: men dominate women and older men dominate younger men. This second aspect of patriarchy has, however, not been central to feminist theory (Ibid.).

Finally, she observes that not only does the drive to re-introduce masculinity into gender studies often result simply in a re-centring of the masculine (which was always already there, even if unsettled very briefly by women’s studies) in academic analysis (and the various forms of policy and politics which flows from that space), but that the fragmentation of masculinity into masculinities often functions in such a way as to mask the need for masculinity—or any derivation thereof on a range of masculinities—to be considered in relation to the feminine. The fundamental power dynamic and power relationships of masculine to feminine do not disappear, even when obscured under a multiplicity of masculinities, and must be returned to central focus.

Recent efforts to revive “patriarchy” as a theoretical tool have in many cases been predicated on the notion that early use of the concept was simplistic and under-theorized, yet that moving away from the concept has left a gap in our practical understanding of the experiences of men and women in society. Indeed, they have also resulted in a fragmentation of masculinity as a social category and a growing emphasis on individual men or varieties of masculinity. Useful though this has
been in many ways, it has also been accompanied by a risk: that gender as a relational category of analysis becomes sidelined, and the central, practical importance of masculinity as a social category (inclusive of its many varieties) in relationship to the feminine (in all of its varieties) has been lost. It would be useful, suggest some, to bring back the concept of patriarchy but to recognize it as an intersectional and complex process. Hunnicutt presents one articulation of this perspective, arguing

in favor of resurrecting the concept of patriarchy and employing it to theorize violence against women. Yet this concept should be employed carefully, with attention to both its helpful and its problematic features. Clearly, patriarchy takes a variety of ideological and structural shapes across the social landscape. Patriarchies do not exist in uniform and systematic ways but instead vary across time, place, and material contexts. These varieties are forever shifting as power relations change in concert with other key social changes. Violence against women is a product of patriarchal social arrangements and ideologies that are sustained and reinforced by other systems of domination. Varieties of patriarchy must be understood holistically, then, in terms of interlocking structures of domination. What is needed is theory construction that allows for variation in degrees, types, and dimensions of dominance, power, and resistance. (Hunnicutt, 2009, pp. 567-568)

In this article my use of the term patriarchy follows the model articulated by Hunnicutt (among others) above. I also use the term misogyny, which I deploy in a general and descriptive fashion following the use proposed by Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007), as a form of behaviour “including not only sexual harassment but also incivility toward women—an understudied form of gendered hostility” (p. 1263). Gilmore, who in his study (2001) on the subject defines misogyny as “a sexual prejudice that is symbolically exchanged (shared) among men, attaining praxis” (p. 9), makes the important observation that “misogyny is the result not of a single-sided hatred of women or a desire to dominate, but rather of affective ambivalence among men” (p. 9). I believe this notion of “affective ambivalence” is useful in understanding how practices and organizations purporting to advocate equality can in fact engage in behaviour that others would construe as misogynistic.

**Toward an Intersectional Analysis**

Hearn among others have engaged in a reclaiming of the concept of patriarchy as an important analytical tool in understanding the response of men to shifting power relations which threaten their privileged position in society, and the backlash this often provokes. He identifies this as an intersectional process, writing that connections can be made between the intersections of gender and one or more social divisions and differences, in the form of multiple oppressions, and thence the analysis and theorizing of patriarchy … one can ask to what extent such social, patriarchal arenas are separate from each other or are interconnected in the formation of patriarchy as a society-wide form. (Hearn, 2009, pp. 182-183)

Applying an intersectional analysis is important in understanding the discursive nature of men’s rights arguments. Sexual orientation and religion/culture are fre-
quently invoked in men’s rights literature and interviews, and it is important to understand the complex manner in which these themes are deployed. Alliances between heterosexual and homosexual men are frequently invoked as an example of the important role played by allies in movements for equality and rights (the implication is that the hegemonic form of masculinity is a heterosexual one). This in turn is contrasted with the experience of homosexual men in Islamic countries. The frequent invocation of Islam is not accidental: feminism is constructed as a threat not only to the idealized form of traditional, hegemonic masculinity that men’s rights groups invoke, but to western culture itself. The argument implies that feminism poses as a critique of western but not “Islamic” culture, or at least deploys its critique in differential ways. The threat to western culture is perceived as a threat to masculine gender norms, and vice versa: western culture is constructed as inherently masculine.

The shared critique of feminism and of Islam has not gone unnoticed. In coverage of the talk published on the Toronto media website Now Toronto, Jonathan Goldsbie writes:

Thankfully, Fiamengo’s speech—titled What’s Wrong With Women’s Studies? Academic Feminism, Censorship & Men—is more ridiculous than distressing.

She frequently returns to the need for more thorough and serious scholarship, yet a large chunk of her talk consists of picking apart specific women’s studies classes, not on the basis of the material they teach but solely on their course calendar descriptions. She thinks that by contrasting the blurb for a U of T course called Gender And Violence [pdf] with that of a UBC course called The Discourse Of Gender In Modern Islam [pdf], she can demonstrate a hypocrisy that lies at the heart of “academic feminism.”

“The course description [for Gender In Modern Islam] contains none of the oppositional critique that was such a central part of the course on Gender And Violence,” she says. Note that the language related to oppression that occurred throughout the previous description is entirely absent here.

By this time, however, it has already become clear that Fiamengo’s issues are not limited to women’s studies but extend to every other “modality of oppression” with which it intersects: race, class, sexuality, etc. She collectively refers to these as “victim studies.” (Goldsbie, 2013, n.p.)

This extension is fundamental to Hearn’s conceptualization of transpatriarchies.

Limiting patriarchy to a particular society, nation, or “culture” is now increasingly problematic, with both greater awareness of global linkages and the assertion of new forms of nationalism in that context…. A significant aspect of this increasing complexity is contemporary global challenges, albeit probably more limited than often supposed, to the nation-state. This is seen in what may appear currently to be opposed transnational forces: On the one hand, the United States (and its allies) represents Christian, military capitalist neoimperialism, while, on the other, exist multinational Islamic power bases, of both the oil-rich postfeudal capitalist and the diasporic jihadist varieties…. Whatever the balance of power seen between the nation-state and forces that transcend it, transnational processes do introduce a variety of in-
tersectional issues into analysis, including patriarchies or transpatriarchies. At the very least, they raise questions of the intersections of gender relations with inter alia citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, racialization, locality and spatiality, identity, and religion. (Hearn, 2009, pp. 183-184)

Conceptualizing the men’s rights movement as an expression of transpatriarchal processes is useful insofar as it reveals both the scope of an ongoing process of reformulating patriarchy in a form designed to be more appealing for the present moment, as well as maintaining the reformulated patriarchy’s continuity with historical forms. Men’s rights groups provide structure and organization for the dissemination of “research” disputing and undermining feminist arguments, for instance surrounding violence against women. Repeated and vocal presence in the media—which is in part engineered through organizing high-profile and controversial events as a means of garnering media attention—lend such arguments greater prominence for a wider audience than they might otherwise receive. The process of normalizing discourse is fundamental to establishing a perception that an ideological position has greater support than it might actually possess, and to feed the concomitant assumption that it is based on stronger empirical data and theoretical foundations than might otherwise be assumed. The resulting perceptions in turn reinforce men’s rights advocates in their efforts to lobby for legislative or judicial change.

A case study from the United States provides a useful example. Earlier this year, Occidental College (Los Angeles, CA) became the site of controversy following statements by the university’s president, who chose to disregard established university procedures by not alerting students to an alleged sexual assault (Wade, 2013). He defended his action by saying that “In the first few hours, days or even weeks, it is not always clear what has happened in incidents like these. Investigators need time to sort through conflicting accounts in order to provide a clear narrative of what took place.” This claim—which sparked a range of protests on campus and in the community—was ably refuted in national media by Lisa Wade, a professor of sociology at the college. “By suggesting that ‘incidents like these’ need vetting, [president of Occidental College] Veitch is reproducing a bias against sexual assault victims that feminists have been trying to eradicate for decades. He is saying that sexual assault reports must be ‘sort[ed] through,’ but reports of all other crimes can be taken at face value,” wrote Wade (2013, n.p.).

While there is no evidence to link men’s rights organizations with incidents and statements like those made by president Veitch, the point here is that the spread of organized structures which undermine and question feminist assertions comprise an important aspect of the “transpatriarchy,” and in turn contribute to an environment in which positions like Veitch’s are received with a greater degree of plausibility. This process occurs transnationally as well, and the resulting application of a double-standard for situations involving sexual violence against women is endowed for many with a heightened level of normalcy, in contradistinction to feminist efforts to reverse this tendency in recent decades.

HEGEMONY, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND MEN

Interesting though it is to consider the men’s rights movement in the context of Hearn’s framework of transpatriarchy, what explains the link which appears to
have emerged in Canada between men’s rights organizations and universities? Many of the key organizers and organizations involved in men’s rights activism are embedded in Canadian universities or have strong links to them, as alumni or independent researchers. What explains this connection?

While the primary objective of this article has been to observe and briefly discuss a recent trend, it points to additional questions and areas worthy of further research. Cannella and Perez (2012) argue that in the university, “Gendered reward structures clearly remain in place.... Structurally, patriarchy and gender-based financial inequities seem to be clear characteristics of the neoliberal university” (p. 280). As discussed above, scholars who study patriarchy and advocate the use of the term (including, at various points, Walby [1990], Hearn [2004, 2009], Kirton [2006] and others) note that patriarchy does not abide by a fixed set of characteristics but is constantly in flux, adapting in response to shifting power relations. Kirton (2006) writes that “patriarchy exists in no constant or fixed form and is therefore spatially and historically contingent” (p. 5). It exerts a hegemonic effect but its specific form is constantly shifting, just as counter-hegemonic efforts seek to displace it. In some ways, this realization has underscored the development of the concept of “hegemonic masculinities.” Yet the relationship between “hegemonic masculinities” and “patriarchies” has been undertheorized. Are hegemonic masculinities patriarchal? Can counter-hegemonic masculinities—if such exist—be patriarchal as well? Is patriarchy—particularly when it comes under feminist scrutiny and critique—inherently hegemonic, or can counter-hegemonic efforts be patriarchal too?

This raises a two-fold challenge. On the one hand, it is a theoretical and conceptual challenge, expressed in the types of questions raised in the preceding paragraph. But at the same time, patriarchy—and enacted forms of masculinities—are real. They are enacted—or resisted—by those who are at the same time seeking to understand them. Men—and women—in the academy are socially located within strata (more usefully perhaps conceived of as webs) of patriarchies and masculinities, hegemonies and counter-hegemonies. If the academy is where the theorizing and production of counter-hegemonic, counter-patriarchal forms begins, is it not logical that it will be there, too, where patriarchy will shift form, adapting to the spatial and historical contingency of its own articulation and the resistance it evokes?

In considering this possibility, it is useful to recall that Hearn (2004) offers a critique of the notion of “hegemonic masculinity,” arguing instead for an analytical focus on the “hegemony of men.” The value of this approach lies in recognizing men as a social category, and in situating the analysis in the context of “critical studies of men” wherein power is a fundamental component of the analysis. Hearn identifies different frameworks through which power can be analyzed, but highlights in particular Lukes’ focus on “interests” (Lukes, 1974), given its emphasis on ideological conditioning, as bearing particular relevance for the study of masculinity.

These suggestions can be useful in understanding the nature and significance of the men’s rights movement. While organizations like CAFE make extensive use of the language of “equality”—qualifying their use of it to very specifically reflect “equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome” (CAFE, 2013)—such an approach to equality fails to address the intersection of power and interests served by this very particular category of academic men. Hence the questions that need to be explored in the context of the academic men who organize under the rubric of
“men’s rights” (and the women involved in such “movement” activism as well): how is power expressed and deployed by the academic men involved with these initiatives? How does the location of these men and their movement within the academy enable the articulation of very particular forms of power? What interests do those forms of power serve? Whose interests does power serve in this context? And how do multiple interests collide? Are there combinations of interests—individual, collective, institutional—which benefit from the activity of men’s rights movement activists, and the power they express? Indeed, recognizing the multiplicity of interests served offers, perhaps, a key to understanding the—at present—smooth coexistence of seemingly contradictory narratives of masculinity within the men’s rights movement. Understanding how these manifest and what effect they are having, not just on men and women but also on the institutions within which they are located (namely, institutions of higher learning), requires further and focused work.

What need to be undertaken, perhaps, are critical studies of academic men. Recognizing the very specific social location of men within the academy—where they are empowered in many ways by a privileged set of academic and theoretical tools—but also as men tied into existing communities and discourses of power and experience (where articulations of hegemonic experience appear, weaken, and are transformed and reformulated in ways which are as yet the subject of insufficient critical research) might offer an enhanced understanding of how the hegemony of men (and forms of neopatriarchy/transpatriarchy) form and re-form deep roots within the academy. The academy—as radicals, schismatics and heretics have known for centuries—offers a privileged place for the articulation of new discourses (and new forms of old discourses). Consequently, it can offer both a space for the development of new and progressive articulations of masculinity, as well as offer a safe haven providing sanctuary and fertile ground for the preservation and re-scripting of more traditionally patriarchal and hegemonic forms of masculinity, and of men.

The rise and spread of the “men’s rights” project—whatever it describes itself as—has a unique relationship to the academy in Canada. This relationship ought to be interrogated more closely. For researchers wishing to contribute to the understanding of (and to intervene in productive ways in) articulations of masculinity and patriarchy, perhaps their own home—the academy—ought to be the place to start.

REFERENCES


