

Masculinity Dilemmas: Sexuality and Intimacy Talk among Christians and Goths

Method: Amy Wilkins conducted participant observation & interviews with members of a campus Christian ministry and the “goth scene”

Both groups of men were marginalized, but benefited from being white and middle class.

“[B]oth Christian and goth men occupy the paradoxical position of having low status among youth while benefiting from whiteness, middle-class status, and masculinity more generally, all of which are, however, invisible resources.”

Both the Christians and the Goths “crafted” ways of being masculine from their subcultures “to ameliorate some of the more restrictive expectations of masculinity,” e.g., “aggressive heterosexuality.

“Both the University Unity and the goth subcultures provide solutions to young men’s dilemmas. Evangelical Christianity and goth culture provide them with community, social support, and tools for thinking about themselves differently. Subcultural participants develop meaningful social ties and find people who are familiar with and sympathetic to their experiences. In both subcultures, participants also learn to think about themselves differently, transforming some of the attributes associated with their marginality into subcultural virtues.”

“The sexual performances of Unity and goth men are distinct, even antithetical, yet each violates dominant notions of young men’s sexuality as voracious, resolutely heterosexual, sexually dominant, and emotionally shallow. Unity members are sexually abstinent, whereas goths are sexually exploratory and endorse some forms of queer play. Moreover, both sets of men portray sexuality as emotionally intimate and evince concern for women’s emotions.”

The Christians were abstinent and transformed heterosexual failure into masculine self-control. This requires “temptation talk.”

The goth scene transforms “conventionally unattractive men into sexually desirable men” and creates “occasions for sexual contact with multiple partners.”

Both sets of men engage in “intimacy talk,” connected to chivalry (Christians) or feminism (Goths) to justify their sexual practices (abstinence or polyamory) and claim “more moral” masculinities.

Neither of the gender projects challenge gendered power hierarchies.