

VICKI L. SOMMER\*

---

## AMSA AT TWENTY — A WOMAN’S JOURNEY

The American Men’s Studies Association is twenty this year! We are all very proud! Belonging to and working within AMSA has been one of the most engaging and rewarding experiences of my professional life. My commitment to AMSA has never wavered, only grown since my first encounter. In this essay, I want to tell the story of my travels in search of understanding the multiple meanings of masculinity, finding AMSA, and why I have stayed in the organization for eighteen years.

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

During the academic year 1993-94, I began a journey that has continued much longer than I could have ever expected. It all started when I began work on a new course I was adding to my department’s curriculum at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. This was to be the first “gender” course ever offered in the Sociology, Anthropology & Social Welfare department. Early in my effort, I located a small number of sociology textbooks that dealt with gender and sex roles, but was sorely disappointed to find each only had a meager few pages on men as men. Of course, men were referred to throughout, but as “the dominant sex,” “perpetrators,” and “holders of power in all social institutions.” The few pages, typically located at the back of the books, gave a short history of the men’s movement and its branches. That was it. I could research more on the movement from these few bits of information, but the texts offered really nothing about “masculinity” per se. Where were the narratives, biographies, and histories of men as men that paralleled the treasures I had read in women’s studies? If there was a men’s movement that began in the 1970s, I was certain there had to be researchers and writers developing the theoretical analysis I was looking for—somewhere.

As the book order deadline approached, I chose one of the available “gender” textbooks in sociology and began my search for articles on men and masculinity to supplement it. I found Michael Kimmel’s (1992) *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the U.S. 1776-1990*. This was an enormous help in providing documents and essays that could build the case that women *and* men were subjected to the conventionalities of gender, and some *men* had ac-

---

\* Augustana College.

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to the author, Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Social Welfare, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois 61201. Email: vickisommer@augustana.edu



THE JOURNAL OF MEN’S STUDIES, VOL. 21, No. 1, WINTER 2013, 34-46.

© 2013 by the Men’s Studies Press, LLC. All rights reserved. <http://www.mensstudies.com>  
jms.2101.34/\$15.00 • DOI: 10.3149/jms.2101.34 • ISSN/1060-8265 • e-ISSN/1933-0251



tually recognized that centuries ago. I also discovered *Men’s Lives*, edited by Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner (1989), which was indeed a prized find. Unfortunately, I didn’t discover until sometime later the article by Kimmel (1993) that I really needed to read: “The ‘Invisibility’ of Masculinity in American Social Science.” Had I found it earlier, I could have framed my argument for the need to include men’s studies in the course and later the curriculum, more convincingly. Another early resource, critical to my journey, was *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men’s Studies*, edited by Harry Brod (1987). What a thrill it was some years later to meet Harry and eventually to work with him on the Board of AMSA. Today, I still use my copy, tattered, with each page lying independently inside the cover, and it still means a lot to me.

After searching through mainline textbooks on sex roles and gender, I realized the study of masculinity was unmistakably subordinated to other perspectives. The popular texts just weren’t “there yet” in terms of providing theory that was equitable in the treatment of both sexes. Having been steeped in women’s studies for over ten years, I was confident the lens of feminist analysis could and should be turned on the lives of men. I also had personal if not lived experience with masculinity. After all, I thought, I had a father, a husband, and a son and had opportunity for plenty of observations over the years. And, in my first career, I worked as a therapist and counselor and dealt with ceaseless gender issues and dynamics presented by patients and clients. My quest to develop a course that examined the gendered lives of both women and men had become a far bigger task than I anticipated. Each article and book I found on men and masculinity was like a bread crumb on the forest floor leading me to something else; I knew I was on the right path. The course could be and would have to be pieced together bit by bit.

I had titled my course *Women & Men in Society*, purposely putting the term “women” as the first word so as to reverse the language norm. As an aside, over the years, it has been fascinating to observe the student response to the course title. As if on automatic pilot, assuming the way we speak matters little, most students simply return the word order to the conventional as they type headings on assignments. Their practice serves to document the unexamined gender order.

Midway through the academic year, I saw a small advertisement for the 1994 AMSA conference in a newsletter. I had never heard of the organization, but was ecstatic that its conference was going to be held in DeKalb, Illinois, close to where I lived. I sent in the registration and, once the weekend arrived, drove to the conference alone. The two hour trip allowed me plenty of time to generate anxious anticipation. A conference “on men”—what would that be like? Would other women be there? Would the AMSA men (I assumed the majority in attendance would be men) welcome women? Or, would they see women as interlopers, meddlers?

I had been to a number of National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) conferences and observed in those early gatherings the mixed responses to the few men who came. Some minority of women didn’t want them there at all—most simply ignored them. I recall a speech by radical feminist philosopher Mary Daly, which was delayed until she was certain the room was emptied of males. Several years later when I heard her again, she simply announced at the start, in a more tempered tone than years earlier, that no questions would be taken from men. Given a number of experiences like these, I was anxious to find out what my reception would be at a “men’s studies conference.” On the home front, my husband was

quite used to me taking off for professional meetings and conferences, but this one brought new questions and concerns from him. He asked me to call him the first evening and give him the “run down” on what I found and assure him I actually gained entrance and was safe.

Once in the right building on the campus of Northern Illinois University, I made my way to the large conference room that would hold most of the weekend events. Posted by the entryway were two men at a table who engaged me in a conversation right away. As I looked at the materials they had and listened to their “issues,” it became clear that these were men who, to put it mildly, weren’t happy with their status in relation to females. More precisely, they were anti-feminist and downright sexist, as were their handouts! This was the “men’s rights” contingent I had read about. They were clearly irate about the nation’s divorce and child custody laws and described how men were the “new victims” in this radical-feminist era. After taking some of their literature (which they actually put in my hand to be sure I took it), I excused myself and moved on into the room. This first encounter certainly didn’t make me comfortable; rather, I was pretty *uncomfortable* and increasingly apprehensive about what would be next.

I’d taken only a few steps when a man approached me with a big smile and a welcoming handshake. He introduced himself as Sam Femiano, President of AMSA. He was warm and gracious with a deep sincerity that seemed literally to wrap around every word he spoke. I had the distinct feeling I was being rescued from the table of two at the front entrance. Sam led me to a small sitting area where two other men introduced themselves as Charles Miley, conference planner, and Jim Doyle of the Men’s Studies Press. I sat down with these three men for some amount of time as they told me what AMSA was and what was to come for the rest of the weekend. These AMSA men seemed honestly glad I was there! I was relieved and felt my anxiety turn into gratitude and eagerness.

As the starting time moved closer, I couldn’t help but notice that there were no other women present. But after my conversations with Sam, Charles, and Jim, this was just an observation, not a worry. I was warmly welcomed by everyone after the entrance-table guys. I noted most AMSA men seemed to brush off the men’s rights guys’ presence; a couple of men actually apologized to me for the sexist materials so prominently displayed at the conference entrance. Yet, I heard over and over that AMSA was open to diverse views—participants were welcome to come and make up their own minds as to whether or not AMSA was a good fit for them. Later, I learned a number of men who saw themselves as “mythopetics” were in attendance; but the majority of members there self-identified as “pro-feminist” academics and practitioners. All of the “branches” of the men’s movement I had read about were represented by those who attended the conference. I was delighted by the opportunity to learn from them.

Although I was the only woman really attending the 1994 conference, I remember another female “stopping in” to greet Charles and the others leading the conference, but I didn’t have a chance to meet her. I think she was a women’s studies faculty member who facilitated the on-campus arrangements. I observed the same attendance pattern several times at the early AMSA conferences. Women’s studies faculty from hosting campuses would make only a brief appearance at the conference. It was clear to me that there was a good deal of tension held by most women’s studies faculty in response to the advancement of men’s studies. I would soon experience this tension first hand on my own campus.

My response to AMSA and men’s studies in general was different. I felt truly grateful for the assistance and advice I received at conferences and subsequent communications with AMSA members. I got exactly what I had hoped I would get—information on interdisciplinary books and articles, a syllabi resource, and lots of ideas about what next steps to take in my course planning. I recall, at that first conference, Jim Doyle generously gave me several of the Men’s Studies Press publications and encouraged any submissions I might develop. I also recall a welcoming conversation with Merle Longwood, now retired professor of religious studies at Siena College and organizer of this twentieth anniversary commemoration of essays. Merle has demonstrated a strong and steady presence in AMSA from the beginning and has been a wonderful colleague to me at many, many conferences. Best of all, this, my first AMSA conference, gave me the feeling I was being accepted into a group whose members were clearly committed to the critical study of men and masculinities, a commitment I would soon share.

The leadership decided to hold the following year’s conference back in DeKalb in 1995. This would be great for me. I returned to the conference and had another incredibly valuable experience. I felt as though the AMSA men were honestly glad I came back. They were very collegial, and I felt the very real sense of community among those attending. For some reason I can’t recall, I couldn’t attend the 1996 conference in Washington, D.C. But that was the only one I have missed since my first in 1994. This leaves only two of the twenty AMSA conferences I wasn’t a part of—a record surpassed by only a handful of others. Although this backward-in-time thinking makes me feel a bit *timeworn*, it also makes me feel quite proud to have played a role in this organization and the enactment of its mission for so long.

For a number of years, AMSA’s conferences were small, allowing many opportunities to get to know the members and talk with authors and presenters. This dynamic was great for me since I wanted to soak up as much knowledge and information about the field and those who worked in it as I could. Yet, I soon shared the hopes and dreams of the AMSA officers that the organization and conferences would grow exponentially. As I continued my personal journey to educate myself in the field of men’s studies, I also embraced the mission and goals of AMSA. These early recollections have enabled me to identify three key things that have kept me connected and committed to the organization: the mission, the people, many of whom have become friends, and the satisfying experience of the conferences.

### CLOSER TO HOME—COMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Examining the process of teaching about men and masculinity as a female has been a strong interest of mine since the beginning of this journey. I recall discussions among feminist women at NWSA conferences and on my own campus in which many questions were raised about the advisability of men teaching women’s studies classes. I had many of the same questions regarding women teaching about men. Can a woman who doesn’t have the lived experience really teach about the lives of men? Will students assume I am biased because I am not a male, yet teach about men? Since most gender classes attract far more females than males, what does a female teacher do to make the “minority” feel safe and free to engage? If a woman is teaching a masculinity class, would any males *ever* enroll?

Over the years, my experiences in teaching classes have helped me to come to at least satisfactory answers to most of these questions. For some time now, I have felt comfortable in the “masculinities classroom” and have had an increasing number of males enroll. The ma-

majority remains female in any gender class our department offers, but gradually more males appear on class lists each year.

Shortly after I began my men's studies "expedition," other faculty in women's studies (all women) on my campus questioned my involvement. At Augustana, I was one of the "founding mothers" of the Women's Studies Program with a strong allegiance to my feminist colleagues and a commitment to building a curriculum based on women's experience. Because my colleagues were certain I had this commitment, they seemed to tolerate my "other interest," although they remained skeptical and some loved to engage me in a friendly argument whenever the topic was raised.

It seemed to me as though the 90s marked the introduction of "men's studies" to the American public, but primarily from the standpoint of the mythopoetics. Through the media, the mythopoetic branch (Robert Bly, Michael Meade, Michael L. Moore, Weekend Warriors, etc.) came to represent the men's movement and men's studies, and those media images became the stereotype. My feminist friends even asked me several times if I had gone off into the woods to drum and meditate with the men at AMSA conferences! There were, as I said earlier, mythopoetics who were members and presenters at the conferences, but no one ever asked me to join in any drumming. Perhaps there were late-night gatherings, drumming, singing—I really had no idea.

Out of interest, I did, however, read many of the popular mythopoetic books, watched the PBS television specials, and completely shared a number of their aspirations for men. My interpretation of several primary goals, those which I embrace, include: to better see the effects of normative masculinity reinforced by modern society; to understand the importance of fathering and an active parenting role for men; and to appreciate the psychological importance of initiation-into-manhood rituals and celebrations of masculinity that are positive and healthy.

Few in academia took the critical study of men and masculinities seriously as an emerging field of study. Once away from the friends and colleagues I knew in AMSA, it was a rather lonely pursuit. From discussions I had with other feminist faculty at NWSA, peer institutions, and on my campus, it was clear hardly anyone in my academic circles really knew much at all about the field of men's studies. Nonetheless, many expressed worry. Some academic women were hostile about the "intrusion" of men in the gender curriculum, assuming they wanted to take over what was still being fought for as a space for women. Others simply thought it was ridiculous to think there would ever be a need for teaching about masculinity as a distinct "study"—after all, the lives of men, the works and wars of men, and the philosophies and dreams of men had always been the focus of the traditional curriculum. Many times I was confronted by statements such as, "The curriculum has always and *only* been about men—this will be a step backwards for women!" I was empathetic to the outcry, but I held my ground with a different perspective. I knew boys and men were shaped and molded by the same norms, values, and institutions as were girls and women. Those who wanted to make masculinity visible had good intentions—the mission was a good one for *both* sexes and society. I was convinced this "making masculinity visible" would be the path to positive individual and social change.

I was successful in "defending" my interest in the study of masculinities in large part because of what I had learned and experienced through AMSA. My affiliation gave me a far richer background and deeper understanding of the importance of the work than a simple

reading of textbooks or journal articles, which were still too few in number. And, my exposure to others who shared an interest in men’s studies from multiple disciplinary perspectives certainly gave me a much more accurate understanding of the young field than the general public was shown by the media.

After the first Program Coordinator stepped down, I served with another woman as Co-Coordinator of the Women’s Studies Program at Augustana for two years as we worked to expand our curriculum and programming offerings. The third year, I became the sole Coordinator and began my plan to “bring men in.” I had been in AMSA for five years and felt confident that my objective to develop a masculinities curriculum alongside that of women’s studies was a good one. I proposed a new governing board structure that would for the first time include two Augustana male professors, one of whom was an out gay man. I hoped he would help us expand our work and our commitment to the further development of gay/lesbian studies. The other male professor was clearly pro-feminist and continues to be involved in the Program today. I also proposed a more inclusive title for the program—Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS). Following much deliberation, mostly about the rightness or wrongness of the proposed name change, we implemented the plan. I was now the Coordinator of the Women’s & Gender Studies Program and would hold that position for fourteen years.

Relationships established in AMSA have been special assets when planning tasks emerged on my campus. Several times, I have been able both to suggest names to others and to invite people to campus for faculty development workshops. In 2002, I stepped up my efforts to broaden and strengthen support for the study of masculinities by procuring a grant that would enable WGS to sponsor a summer curriculum development workshop for interested faculty. I invited AMSA President, Mark Justad, to campus to teach faculty about pro-feminist men’s studies theory and the mission and work of AMSA. Mark ably led the audience through key feminist writers and theorists and linked ideas and understandings to the critical study of masculinities. The facility with which he moved back and forth between gender lenses and theories made a lasting impression on our faculty. Mark shared the workshop limelight with Iris Marion Young, who I had invited to address feminist theory and issues of gender politics in education and society. Weeks earlier, I sent workshop participants her book, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (1997) to prepare us for discussion. Both Iris and Mark performed their tasks beautifully and were very supportive of the plans I had. It was an extraordinary workshop—minds were opened and seeds for a new curriculum planted for the next phase of development.

The following year brought the opportunity for me to write another, larger grant for WGS. With the support of others in the Program, I launched the work that would lead to the eventual fulfillment of our long-held desire for a major in WGS. The College had secured a Lilly grant to develop a Center for Vocational Reflection that would, among other things, sponsor curriculum development. I was encouraged by the new Center director to be the first program/department chair to apply for an internal grant. Over the course of several months, I completed the writing, got the grant, and led WGS faculty in the development of four new courses that would enable us to offer a major. All of us in the Program wanted to add a course on the history of the women’s movement in America. Additionally, I advocated for a course on gender and sexuality and two courses on masculinity, one focusing on the U.S. and one that took a global perspective. In the end, the courses added were titled: *Women and Change in America*, *Gender and Sexuality*, *Masculinity in America*, and *Global Masculinities*.

Work on the Global Masculinities course was especially challenging in 2002. By then, the numbers of texts, research studies, and ethnographies addressing Western and U.S. masculinities had increased significantly; but there were still too few non-Western offerings. We found very little in print that could be construed as a unifying global theory of masculinity. Rather, we had to rely on a few site-specific ethnographies for readings and make our own connections back to theory developed by such authors as R. W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, Harry Brod, and Michael Kaufman. After our grant work was completed and the WGS major proposal materials were submitted, we found several new publications we could later use in classes. Two collections in particular were very helpful to me in sections of the course that I offered in later years. Zed Books' Global Masculinities Series issued two volumes in 2002: *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, edited by Francis Cleaver (2002) and *A Man's World: Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World*, edited by Bob Pease and Keith Pringle (2002). I recall moments of excitement when I discovered another new book or article that served as one more marker of the steady development of the global perspective on masculinities. I had previously observed the same progression of growth in women's studies research and theory. The pattern seemed to be that the lens of analyses of those in the field gradually widened from local to global, with theories that connected and synthesized surfacing some years later. More and more rapidly, signs of the evolution of the field of men's studies could be found by those who were looking.

My personal history with AMSA colleagues and the academic theories, research, and applications I encountered at conferences helped provide me the tools I needed to build the gender and masculinities curriculum and, just as important, the certainty of purpose to undertake the work. By the end of the academic year, the faculty senate approved both the new courses and the major.

### MOVING CLOSER TO THE CENTER

To my delight, my role in AMSA in 1998 expanded from member to *elected* Board member. I came on the Board along with Enid Bloch, a classics professor at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. We were the pioneer women in AMSA leadership! We both felt very privileged to have been elected and anxious to take part in the work of the organization. Our first Board meeting was at the Youngstown, Ohio conference. The following year, Enid, Mark Kann (University of Southern California) and I took on conference planning for the 2000 Buffalo, New York conference. Enid served as the onsite coordinator for us on her own campus at Buffalo. Writing this essay spurred me to phone Enid to check in with her and ask questions about what she recalled from some twelve years ago. I can report that she continues to write and teach about masculinities and holds fond memories of her time working on the AMSA Board.

One of my indelible memories of the Buffalo conference (a memory shared by Enid) was a presentation by a young scholar, Loren Frankel, who introduced his doctoral research on boys' semenarche as a socio-biological rite of passage. I knew little of this male experience and had never before heard the term, but was intrigued by the comparison to the female menarche and how very differently boys, parents, and culture at large responded to these biological markers of the passage into adulthood. For several years that followed, Loren was an active AMSA supporter and contributed a number of cutting-edge papers on sexuality at

our conferences. I recall reading the tragic news that Loren died in a car accident, news delivered by Sam Femiano, who was very close to him. At the next Board meeting, we made the decision to establish a scholarship in Loren’s honor. Today, the Loren Frankel Memorial Scholarship continues to provide monetary awards to student winners whose papers have been both accepted for the conference and judged competitively. We have funded this scholarship through donations from members and supporters since 2005. Having served on the Scholarship Committee for several years, I can attest that there are increasing numbers of submissions from many disciplines and each year seems to bring a higher level of excellence. It is also worth noting that we have had an increasing number of submissions from students outside the U.S. Part of AMSA’s mission is to support the development of the critical study of men and masculinities and the Frankel scholarship provides a vehicle for AMSA to foster and support young scholars.

Several years after that Buffalo conference, I became Secretary on the Board. I had some initial, internal resistance to assuming the role of “secretary,” given my minority status of female, but I knew there was nothing sexist in being asked to serve. I also knew from experience that I was a chronic, detailed note taker wherever I was. Others have since taken a turn as “secretary.” When the need arose on the Board four years ago, I again volunteered. This time the Board agreed to change the job title to “Recorder.” I like this much better. Being a female on the Board isn’t as unusual today as it once was. Today there are five women out of eighteen elected Board members. Given that there were no other women at the first conference I attended and only a handful of female attendees for the first few years, I think it is safe to say that I am the longest serving female AMSA member and Board member. In all conscience, I can say that I have made a solid contribution to the organization and time has only deepened my commitment to the mission and work of AMSA.

### AMSA CONFERENCES THAT HOLD A SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART AND MIND

Over the years, almost all disciplines have been represented by researchers and scholars presenting papers and workshops at AMSA conferences—religious studies, sociology, psychology, social work, literature, philosophy, film, communication studies, history, classics and languages—something for everyone. Although most seemed intent on teasing out aspects of masculinity through disciplinary lenses, few missed incorporating at least some contextual dynamics that shaped masculinity. It is important to mention that from the beginning there has been a consistent representation of practitioners—including therapists, counselors, and social workers—who have given papers and workshops. Whether thinking about the theoretical or the applied conference presentations, the most energizing aspect of exchanges with conference participants was and remains the nearly universal feeling one gets of a shared project—to create meaning and to generate understandings of masculinities.

A number of my “special” AMSA remembrances are anchored in conferences in which both the keynote speeches and interactions with the speakers themselves deeply affected me. These remembrances are interlaced with my personal theoretical understandings illustrative of how each encounter advanced my thinking. One of my strongest early memories of a truly remarkable speech was that of Staughton Lynd at the 1998 Youngstown, Ohio conference. Today’s *Wikipedia* citation for Mr. Lynd describes him as a long term social activist,

community organizer and “self-described ‘social democratic pacifist’” (2012). Lynd proved every bit the activist in his message to AMSA. He urged AMSA members to be dogged in their work to make masculinity visible as a first step in the change process that would both free men and spur equality. His message connected with me both because of my social work background and the fact that I was vitally committed to gender social change. I was inspired by his deep understanding of men as workers in American society and how AMSA had an important role to play in making men’s lives as men visible to both academics and the public.

As a member of the conference planning team for 2000, I was pleased to play a deciding role in who were invited as speakers. We had learned of Chris Kilmartin’s new stage show chronicling the hazards of masculinity and invited him to be our conference performance artist. Kilmartin is an academic psychologist who had recently added stage work to his repertoire. His show, *Crimes of Nature*, proved to be both funny and poignant. The night’s presentation was videotaped and later widely sold to colleges and universities around the country. Chris was later invited to my campus to perform—a performance that had a significant impact on many males and females in attendance and one that is still referred to in conversations about gender among some faculty.

Michael Messner accepted the invitation to be keynote speaker. Those in attendance were privileged to take away a much richer understanding of his observations on gendered play than would be possible from a mere reading of his published articles alone. I eagerly integrated a number of these insights into my coursework, adding new layers of meaning to the readings already assigned. The combined impact of Messner and Kilmartin, the forty-eight other presenters, colleagues and friends, made this an unforgettable AMSA production.

Another remarkable conference was that of 2003 in Nashville. AMSA President Mark Justad was largely responsible for getting two of the leading gender theorists, R.W. Connell and Susan Bordo, as keynote speakers. Both gave wonderful talks, but what I remember most is the time spent with each of them in conversation. Working hard not to be annoying, I recall asking a lot of questions about particular pieces of their writings. Each was taking a look at masculinity from a very different angle. Bringing the two together seemed brilliant. It was like the twist of a kaleidoscope, as attentions shifted from the intimate and personal to the remote and complex. In the end, the result was a nearly perfect, holistic collage of masculinity.

Bordo (2000) was focused on the body, as she was in her most recent book, *The Male Body*. I associated much of her talk with *habitus*, a concept that originated with Aristotle and centuries later was elaborated upon by a number of sociological theorists, each of whom described how aspects of culture become anchored in the minds, bodies, and daily practices of individuals within those cultures. The weekend’s conversations sharpened my appreciation of the ways bodies, even though discrete agents, are daily molded in interaction within their environments, habituated into dispositions, making the individual in some ways a mere echo of the day-to-day context in which they exist.

Connell, on the other hand, was focused on connecting public policies, nationalism, and globalism to definitions of and limits on multiple masculinities. His speech, “Masculinities, Change, and Conflict in Global Society: Thinking about the Future of Men’s Studies,” (2003) was great. Future men’s studies work, he said, must be global, taking into account the large scale social processes of state and corporate relations, trade and global markets,

that affect the lives of both women and men and create a global gender order. Everything Connell said was music to my ears. It had been such a struggle to piece together a global masculinities course a year and a half earlier; I was thrilled by the arguments he made and his obvious commitment to this research and writing path. This conference was absolutely extraordinary in creating moments of percipience that could be interwoven into fabric symbolizing both the micro and macro contexts of men's lives. Books signed that weekend by Bordo and Connell are in a special place on my shelf and the memories safely stowed, yet nearly crystal clear.

Board discussions to identify the 2004 conference theme and speakers centered on diversity—we particularly wanted to emphasize masculinity through the lenses of ethnicity and sexuality. The speaker invitations were accepted and again, the results were exceptional. Held back on the campus of Northern Illinois University, the 2004 conference featured David T. Abalos, who had recently authored the book *The Latino Male: A Radical Redefinition* (2002), and Robert F. Reid-Pharr, author of *Black Gay Man: Essays* (2001). I recall driving home after the conference, thinking about how both men had painted vibrantly clear pictures of what I already knew to be a truth: “The personal is political.” This 60s feminist mantra certainly *is* a truth for men as well as for women. Each author, although stylistically very different, eloquently painted mindscapes of men whose lives are not privileged by racial-ethnic or heterosexual status, but positioned lower down the rungs of the invisible hierarchy of masculinity. Through the use of personal narratives, the speakers brought to life for me the meaning of “the personal is political” in men's lives.

In 2008 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on the campus of Wake Forest University, once again AMSA offered members an unforgettable experience. R.W. Connell had been invited to be the keynote speaker for the second time. This time she would be introduced as Raewyn Connell, having just completed her medical and legal transition from male to female. I joined the *Faculty Seminar on the Critical Study of Men and Masculinities* for a day billed as “collaborative learning” that preceded the conference. A number of interesting papers on the male experience were given, but, of course, Connell was the star attraction. Having recently published, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (2007), she was actively seeking discussion of how global politics and change affects the everyday performance of diverse masculinities.

Acknowledging the methodological difficulties of cross-cultural research, she strongly encouraged faculty to undertake projects that would aid in developing the field and “beyond-the-metropole” understandings of masculinities. As she talked, global and local aspects of economic, social, and political forces affecting indigenous men, migrant men, middle-class men, even men seated in global power centers became vivid images in my mind. I could imagine how each institutional force experienced in everyday living exerted both pushes and pulls on men and boys. In my imagination, I likened these forces to strands of yarn that were watchfully intertwined into an intricate weaving that depicted the “standard of masculinity” for each locale. I could understand how, for the most part unknowingly, men and boys daily wrap themselves in these weavings making them integral to their identities.

It was an amazing day that both confirmed and advanced my thinking. In addition to the one-on-one discussions I was able to have with Connell throughout the conference, each of which I treasured, the memory of several of her comments about AMSA were seared into

my memory. Connell told the audience that AMSA was the lead organization on the international stage devoted to the advancement of research and theory on men and boys. The “lead” organization! Globally! All of us on the Board left this conference with a sense of deep satisfaction and bursting with pride.

Victor Seidler, of Goldsmiths, University of London, was the featured speaker in 2009 at our first outside-of-the-U.S. AMSA conference. We held it on the campuses of McGill and Concordia Universities in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with the conference theme: *Beyond Borders: Masculinities and Margins*. All of us on the Board were thrilled by the invitation of fellow Board member, Gilles Tremblay, to hold our conference in Montreal. Everyone considered this a giant step for AMSA. This conference would serve as a marker of our commitment to advancing the critical study of men and masculinity in global perspective.

Seidler’s speech was fascinating, and he was charming in personal conversations. Most striking were his meticulous examples that to me demonstrated universalist definitions of hegemonic masculinities that trap men and boys in a vice-squeezed existence, held between the jaw of others’ expectations and the jaw of their own longing to self-define (an image created in my mind stemming from a familiarity with the tools in our garage). His speech took me back to the stories I had read in his publications. Yet, Seidler worked to return our focus to the global forces, cultural differences, and the power of place to shape the identities of young men. For a long time afterward, his illustrations of how social forces and individual young men’s lives are connected stuck with me. Each chronicled so well recurrent life patterns of young men who were keenly aware of the hierarchical ordering of masculinities, yet struggled against prevailing expectations and stereotypes to hold on to an authentic expression of themselves as body and mind.

The Kansas City conference (2011), adeptly planned by onsite coordinator, Bob Minor, was one of our best ever attended and most enjoyable. The keynote speaker was Michael Kimmel and Todd Reeser joined us as our Scholar-in-Residence. Kimmel, with adroit humor and insight, related many of the dynamics of “guyland” drawn from his book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (2008). Reeser shared pieces of theory from his new book, *Masculinities in Theory* (2010), which takes a humanities approach to understanding the complexities and intersectionalities of masculinities. Reeser used examples from art, film, and literature to illuminate various aspects of masculinity and demonstrate just how inherently unstable the term masculinity actually is. (When I used Reeser’s book in my course, my students found it to be a challenging read, yet engrossing with its analyses of representations of diverse masculinities such as racialized masculinities and female masculinities.) It had been years since I had last seen Kimmel at a sociology conference. He now clearly holds a position of preeminence in gender and masculinities studies. He has been vitally important in advancing the field, and we AMSA members were thrilled to have him with us for the weekend. I recall a conversation in which I thanked him for his body of work in gender and masculinities, acknowledging that it had been critical to my own learning and classroom teaching for many years. It seemed far too little—I wanted to give him a prize, a trophy, or at least a plaque.

#### HERE AND THERE

So where am I now in my journey with AMSA I started some eighteen years ago? I’m still traveling. I serve as the Recorder to the Board and the Executive Committee—a role in

which I am pleased to play a part in the decision making and at times being able to offer “the institutional memory” as to what has gone before. Sometimes that comes in handy! I very much enjoy my colleagues on the Executive Committee and Board and always look forward to our “Doodled” conference calls and work together. Our President, Robert Heasley, is a delight to work with—a man with a fine balance of the instrumental and expressive. His leadership has brought us increased visibility and moved us forward on a number of long-held goals.

We are more systematized as a Board and organization than we have ever been—at least from my point of view. We are planning a Board retreat this fall to work specifically on organizational development. Our first retreat two years ago proved beneficial in clarifying our mission and generating ideas for advancement. A hoped for outcome of our upcoming retreat includes identifying specific tasks and responsibilities that will move us closer to achieving our shared goals. One such possibility may be a grant application that could enable AMSA-sponsored research and serve to develop both the organization and the field.

The 2013 conference planning is well underway. Our newsletter has been revived by Jim Maurino and is now remarkably interesting and attractive. And, most importantly, AMSA now has an institutional home. Like many professional membership organizations, AMSA’s official place of residence has been situated with whoever is president. As one might well imagine, this has been less than ideal. This past spring, AMSA moved to the University of Michigan’s School of Social Work in the Special Initiatives Office. We have actual office space and staff and, most significantly, a supportive environment in which to grow. Board member and Vice President, Daphne Watkins, skillfully facilitated negotiations between the Dean of the School of Social Work, Laura Lein, and AMSA President Robert Heasley to make this dream a reality. Our upcoming retreat will be held in Ann Arbor, as will the 2013 conference. Everyone will have the opportunity to visit our new home and meet people involved at the university. Although I have not yet met them, I already think of them as members of the family, holding down the fort on the home front.

“AMSA at Twenty”—finds the organization on the cusp of a new life stage. It feels like we are in transition, a transition parallel to the human life stage transition occurring around age twenty or twenty-one. Perhaps we are moving into “true” maturity with all the rights and privileges appertaining to “genuine adulthood.”

The organization’s leadership is optimistic. My hope for AMSA is that we are indeed entering our adulthood, becoming our mature self, a manifestation of the dreams so many have held for twenty years: a professional organization that in every way leads the critical study of masculinities to new heights and deepened cultural understandings. All of us want desperately to influence the wider public’s understanding of masculinity. As academics, therapists, and community workers, we can only reach so many with our daily work. We in AMSA want to share the knowledge we have with the multitudes, use it to change the course of history, improve the lives of *both* men and women, and make our national and global institutions more bearable. Lofty goals, big dreams—yes, they are, but shared by those with whom I work in AMSA. If *you* have ever dreamed such dreams, consider joining AMSA and me on our collective journey—a journey passionately dedicated to change and transformation. It has been and will be a good trip!

## REFERENCES

- Abalos, D. (2002). *The latino male: A radical redefinition*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers.
- Bordo, S. (2000). *The male body: A new look at men in public and in private*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Brod, H. (Ed.). (1987). *The making of masculinities: The new men's studies*. Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin.
- Cleaver, F. (Ed.). (2002). *Masculinities matter! Men, gender and development*. London, United Kingdom: Zed Books.
- Connell, R.W. (2003). Masculinities, change, and conflict in global society: Thinking about the future of men's studies. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11(3), 249-266.
- Connell, R.W. (2007). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.
- Kimmel, M. (1992). *Against the tide: Pro-feminist men in the U.S. 1776-1990*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Kimmel, M. (1993). The "invisibility" of masculinity in American social science. *Society*, 30(6), 28-35.
- Kimmel, M. (2008). *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Kimmel, M., & Messner, M. (Eds.). (1989). *Men's lives*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing.
- Pease, B., & Pringle, K. (Eds.). (2002). *A man's world: Changing men's practices in a globalized world*. London, United Kingdom: Zed Books.
- Reeser, T. (2010). *Masculinities in theory: An introduction*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, Ltd.
- Reid-Pharr, R. (2001). *Black gay man: Essays*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Staughton Lynd. (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2012, from [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staughton\\_Lynd](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staughton_Lynd).
- Young, I.M. (1997). *Intersecting voices: Dilemmas of gender, political philosophy, and policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Copyright of Journal of Men's Studies is the property of Men's Studies Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.