

William Dawley

Changed men: how peer group support remakes masculinity in the evangelical and support group movements

JOINT SEMINAR SKOK / DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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SKOK, Ida Bloms Hus, Allegaten 34

Abstract The emergence of new religious and spiritual movements in Latin America and the emergence of new models of masculinity noted by many Latin Americanists have rarely been interpreted as interrelated phenomena, yet this presentation tries to demonstrate that they are, both because of how gender and religion have been co-constructed in the region and because both the evangelical and support group movements have placed a great deal of emphasis on changing models of masculinity, as Brusco, Brandes, Gutmann, and others working in Latin America have previously suggested. Although many contemporary religious and spiritual movements share an interest in transforming participants' character and sense of identity, this presentation deals with the unexamined role of peer group support in producing these transformations in participants in the evangelical and support group movements, where such groups provide a source of shared identity and a safe space for men to practice performing new models of masculinity. In

particular, this is done through the narrative practice that Alcoholics Anonymous popularized as "sharing," whereby one's experiences are framed in a V-shaped narrative that ascends in a project of ongoing spiritual and ethical development, toward a new model of identity. The many points of comparison between the two movements – not only their shared practices or overlapping discourses, but their comparable ethos and peer group organization – have not been thoroughly explored, either for their role in contributing to the growth of the movements or for their role in helping them to develop alternative models of masculinity. This presentation, based on ethnographic research and life history interviews with participants of three men's groups in Quesada de San Carlos in northern Costa Rica (including AA, a Christian "transdenominational" men's group, and a men's therapy group), draws attention to the way that peer groups, in particular those organized around a supportive ethos and narrative practices,

can become sites of creative transformation not only for individuals, but for the way religion, spirituality, and gender are imagined.

William Dawley is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, San Diego, where he has been a student of Professor Joel Robbins (now at Trinity College in Cambridge) and Professor Suzanne Brenner. His research deals with the anthropology of Christianity (and of new forms of religious, spiritual, and therapeutic movements in general), the study of gender and the family, and the way that these aspects of culture hang together with urbanization and economic transformations, especially as many of these transformations are typified in his field site in northern Costa Rica, which he has visited since 2003. Currently, he is also a special editor and contributor to an upcoming issue of *Anthropological Quarterly* on religion and masculinities.