

INTRODUCTION

Although the metaphor of invisibility has surrounded the topic of masculinities for many years now, at this point in the 21st century we would certainly agree that masculinities are not as invisible as Michael Kimmel paradoxically perceived them to be in the late 1980s (Kimmel and Messner xvi). Tim Edwards asserted in 2006 that “we are aware of masculinity in the twenty-first century as never before,” although he admitted that it was “at once everywhere and yet nowhere, known and yet unknowable, had and yet *un-have-able*” (1). The process of gendering masculinities has proved fruitful, has contributed to expanding and enriching the scope of analysis of many disciplines and, according to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, has shown that “[a]nalyzing men as a politically gendered category removes it from its normative location as transparent, neutral and disembodied” (29). The quantity of academic works on the subject shows that more and more interest has been taken in approaching masculinities from different angles and from different fields, no doubt under the initial influence of feminism, which pushed forward the necessity of analyzing that other half of the binary which had always been taken for granted. Later poststructuralism helped to break and disperse the dichotomy, emphasizing that “the living of gender categories and divisions is more contradictory, fragmented, shifting and ambivalent than the dominant public definitions of these categories suggest” (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 9). In my opinion, the gender paradigm has benefited from the poststructural debate, insofar as it has made us reflect on and rework the categories of gender and sexuality and it has continued delving into the paradoxes. The interdisciplinary and intersectional outlooks demonstrated by different scholars for more than thirty years now have shown that it is of the utmost importance to analyze the (re)presentations of masculinities and femininities from every field of knowledge in the humanities, in order to reveal how they are constructed and perceived, but also in order to conceive social change.

The present special issue, to which scholars from different disciplines have been invited to contribute, is intended to be a reflection on the work which is currently being done in the field of masculinities. Four of the essays deal with theoretical, conceptual, or empirical issues, studied from sociological and philosophical perspectives, whereas four others focus on the representation of masculinities in the works of different literary writers; an interview with sociologist Mike Messner on the recent publication of his memoir serves as a transitional bridge between both sections. The idea of the first person was proposed as a guiding, not a restrictive suggestion at the outset of this project. The contributors’ responses reveal, in my opinion, the many possibilities that the study of masculinities in the first person



offers both theoretically and practically. Some of the participants have specifically reflected on masculinities in the first person, as initially suggested; some have used the first person in dealing with their subject matter—albeit it is taken for granted that scholars somehow reflect that first person in their work; some have made use of their ethnographic research, where the first person of the men interviewed can be heard; and others have used a variety of narratives, whether academic, autobiographical or fictitious to analyze representations of masculinities. The first person seems to be always there, whether singular or plural, whether outwardly spoken or hidden behind the words uttered. The analyses which compose this special issue also show, amongst other things, that new concepts and theories are being proposed and applied, that changes regarding homophobia have taken and are taking place, that masculinity is not only a matter of male, but also of female bodies, that the theories which attempt to dismantle the gender binary need to be thoroughly applied in order to avoid contradicting their basic premises, that emotions are important to men in their understanding of themselves, and that gender relations are affected by power relations, by displacement, by questions of class, race or national origin.

The overall impression at the outcome of the editing process is that it is important to make use of as many analytical tools as possible to further explore masculinities. In this obviously limited volume old concepts and theories are being used, revised or contested, and new ones are being proposed, defined, and discussed. This volume is specifically focused on north-western—mostly US and British—representations of masculinities, which does not mean that we are not aware of the important contributions and responses to gender studies that are coming from south-eastern cultures under the pivotal influence of postcolonial theories. As Mac an Ghaill and Haywood also asserted in 2007, there is still “much empirical and conceptual work to be done in exploring the gendering of men” (29).

I would like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the contributors and interviewee who have collaborated in the creation of this special issue on “Contemporary Masculinities in the First Person.” I would like to thank them for their willingness to participate, as well as for their cordiality, generosity, and patience throughout the process of edition. Additionally, I would also like to thank my colleague and friend Dr. Ann MacLaren who, as always, has generously helped in the process of correction and edition of the present issue.

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