

AFTERWORD

This short book has presented an analysis of contemporary masculinities as evolving, convoluted, and rich, with men grappling with conventional and modern ideals and practices relating to their bodies, emotions, and relationship with self and others. It perhaps chimes with increasingly sophisticated depictions (and deconstructions) of men and masculinity within popular culture. In the popular US sitcom *Modern Family*, for example, even Jay, the grizzled patriarch, is shown to have ‘soft’ moments while Phil, the ostensibly more evolved and gentle son-in-law, is sometimes seen to seek more traditional masculine approval (the rendering of gay masculinity in the characters of the married couple Cam and Mitch is similarly nuanced). In the UK, a recent bestselling autobiography by the comic actor and writer Robert Webb portrays the struggles with and pointlessness of traditional masculinity norms (title: ‘How not to be a boy’). Of course, these characterisations sit alongside more one-dimensional and normative constructions of masculinity within popular culture, but arguably we are now witnessing an expansion in the repertoires of masculinity available.

Broadly, I paint a (critically) positive portrait in the book, drawing attention to progress and possibilities, with (some) men now caring more for their own well-being and that of others and in so doing rejecting or reworking traditional gender scripts. At the same time, this (cautiously) optimistic tone must be informed by continuing constraints and contradictions; for example, while more men are learning to articulate their

feelings and needs, at least in certain ‘safe’ contexts (e.g. online forums), the statistics for male suicide remain worryingly high, suggesting that a significant number of men and boys struggle with emotional expression and help-seeking. Although several interventions have been designed to tackle this issue in several countries, more resources and initiatives are required within mental health promotion to reach more men.

An important point emphasised in the book is the need to consider how masculinities are intersected by other pertinent social identity categories such as race, sexual orientation, and social class. Increasingly, masculinity scholars are exploring how masculinity is constructed and constrained in relation to particular communities of men; for example, considering how black and minority ethnic men negotiate masculinity in the context of racism or how white working-class men experience assimilation into neoliberal gig economy working arrangements. Age is another interesting dimension—how are different generations responding to contemporary images of masculinity, and how is masculinity enacted within diverse environments (school, workplace, family)?

Finally, the rising number of boys and men involved in campaigns for gender equality is a heartening phenomenon. Across the world there is evidence of male engagement in a range of programmes designed to challenge ‘toxic’ iterations of masculinity and to promote the welfare and status of girls and women and marginalised groups of men. More generally, there seems to be more media and public awareness of problems associated with men and masculinity, as evidenced by the outcry and campaigning post-Weinstein (cf. #metoo), and a genuine appetite to tackle sexism, sexual exploitation, and inequalities. Although the current political climate also promotes conservative and men’s rights agendas in several Western societies, this does not detract from the parallel efforts to promote a fairer society which values more tolerant, inclusive masculinities and equality between men and women.

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