

Contemporary Masculinities

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Embodiment, Emotion and Wellbeing

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For my son Finn, in my biased opinion a great exemplar of sophisticated young masculinity—but also for my daughter Darcy, a strong female who insists on nothing less from the men in the house. And for Majella, for all her support, emotional and academic, over the years—and for making me a better man.

PREFACE

I have been wanting to write a single-authored book for a while now. Previous books have mostly involved co-authors and co-editors, but only one has focused on masculinities—in the context of men’s health (Gough and Robertson 2009). For a number of years I have been working with colleagues on a variety of topics concerning men and masculinities, ranging from male cosmetic use to accounts of depression, resulting in many journal articles, book chapters, and talks. But I have not yet had the opportunity to try to tie all this work together, and feel that to do so would explicate some implicit themes and issues which could advance the field—hence the reason for this book. So, I will attempt to articulate what I have learnt about masculinities over the years while being involved in different research projects.

For context, to help frame the book, it makes sense to say something about my background and approach. I am a social psychologist by training but engage with work from other social science disciplines (e.g. sociology) and interdisciplinary fields (including, notably, critical studies of men and masculinities), and have published in diverse places, such as health, sociology, and gender studies journals. I am currently co-editor of the APA journal *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, with a brief to promote articles from outside Psychology and using a range of methods and theories. The book with Steve Robertson (Gough and Robertson 2009) is an edited volume which features contributions from media studies, nursing, sport science, and sociology, among others. Like many scholars in the field of men and masculinities, I have been influenced by the work of Connell (1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) while also engaging with

critiques of hegemonic masculinity and other concepts, mainly developed by sociologists, such as inclusive masculinity (Anderson 2009), pastiche masculinity (Atkinson 2010), and hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2012). Within social psychology, the seminal work of Wetherell and Edley (e.g. 1999) has had a marked impact on my research and thinking, encouraging close attention to the discourse practices of men and to locally pertinent norms of masculinity.

I am also a qualitative researcher and champion of qualitative research methods within Psychology and beyond. As co-founder and co-editor of the journal *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, I have endeavoured to promote quality, diversity, and innovation in qualitative methods. My own approach to research could be summed up as constructionist, psychosocial, and inductive: prioritising participant perspectives and locating these within relevant contexts, both proximal (i.e. research context and dynamics) and distal (e.g. wider gender norms and constraints). In recent years, I have moved beyond interview and focus group research to embrace other methods and data sources, in particular digital materials. This shift has been mainly prompted by my postgraduate students and early career colleagues engaged with social media, user-generated accounts (e.g. vlogs), and online interactions (e.g. support forums), and follows trends in the field towards more creative, multi-media, and ‘naturalistic’ research designs (e.g. Gough and Lyons 2016; Braun et al. 2017). In particular, we have found that many men, including hard-to-reach groups, are willing to provide accounts of their experiences and practices online, so many research examples cited in the book will derive from digital data.

In terms of research topics, I suppose I have been fascinated by studying men’s sense-making in domains which have historically been dominated by women and thus considered feminised or feminising. So, the topics I have studied include men’s accounts of diet, body image, and vulnerability. I have been intrigued to examine how men justify their engagement with ‘the feminine’ and the identity work that ensues: how do men who wear make-up/express emotion/nurture others reproduce, rework, and reject masculinity norms? And what do these data signal about contemporary masculinities more generally—and current theories of masculinities?

This book interrogates conventional assumptions about masculinity and men’s health and offers a coherent social-psychological position. It brings together in one place over a decade’s work which showcases discursively inflected qualitative research using data sources where men’s own

accounts are prioritised, for example in-depth interviews and online discussion forums. It differs from previous men's health books which tend to be edited collections (e.g. Gough and Robertson 2009; Broom and Tovey 2009), while books on masculinity do not cover embodiment, emotions, or well-being in depth (e.g. Anderson 2009; Kahn 2009).

The book opens with a review of theory and research on contemporary masculinities; the second chapter looks at men's appearance concerns and activities; the third chapter covers male mental health, focusing on vulnerability and its management. The final chapter considers men's care for others (e.g. peers, partners), identifying ways in which men formulate support requests and responses, and how/why they champion certain groups (e.g. women; LGBT+ communities). The book concludes with an afterword, reflecting on current trends and key concepts, including intersectionality, inequalities, and embodiment.

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