

IN TRANSITION BUT NEVER UNDONE?: CONTESTING MASCULINITY

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Abstract.

This paper attempts to “trouble” the widespread assumption that South African masculinities are currently in flux. It argues that a rhetoric heralding the rise of alternative masculinities is nothing new and shows how the talk of white, privileged men, while ostensibly eschewing traditional masculinity, often ultimately works to reinscribe rather than undo the centrality of masculinity. The paper also argues for a more theoretically nuanced analysis of masculinity which resists the urge to reduce masculinity to the realm of individualist subjectivity and which recognises the overdetermined interpenetration of ideology, power relations and socio-material constraints in the reproduction of subjectivity.

“masculinity has always been in one crisis or another”
(John MacInnes, 1998:11)

The past decade has seen a burgeoning interest in “masculinity” within the South African context. Although South African men were being put on the agenda as early as 1991 (see Hempson, 1991; Meintijies, 1991), before 1995 there were few publications or forums in which the term “masculinity” appeared as a central object of investigation. Interestingly, coinciding with the shift to post-apartheid democracy in 1994, a steady stream of articles, conferences, special journal issues and colloquiums have explored the issue of men and masculinities within the South African scene. A so-called “crisis of masculinity”, already declared within Euro-American contexts in the 1960s and 1970s (Lemon, 1995), has recently been hailed within South Africa (Morrell, 2001; Walker, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005). According to researchers interested in South African “masculinity”, the transition to democracy and concomitant “liberalization” of sexuality (Walker, 2005) and commitment to gender equality inculcated by the post-apartheid state, has left South African men “troubled” (Reid & Walker, 2005) and “unsettled and unsure of their place in the new order” (Morrell, 2001:21). Due to a range of factors such as, for example, the HIV/AIDS crisis, changing gender relations, an increasing media gaze on men and the transition to a new socio-political order, masculinity is said to be in

a “state of flux, reconfiguration and change” (Reid & Walker, 2005:2). This special issue of **PINS**, geared towards exploring “Masculinity in transition”, itself forms part of a broader rhetorical construction of South African masculinities as in a “transitional”, shifting or reorganising mode.

It is the purpose of this short paper to interrogate the increasingly accepted notion that South African masculinities are “in transition” by highlighting and reflecting upon the results of a small qualitative study done by the first author in 1998 and raising some deliberately provocative questions about the theoretical and conceptual directions that South African studies of “masculinity” seem to be taking. Having concluded in this small piece of research on “white” masculinity in 1998 that, “masculinity is in a state of profound change” (Chadwick, 1998:34), we were intrigued to see the advert for this special issue, in which “masculinity” was clearly *still* being hailed as “in transition” close to a decade later. While the late 1990s heralded the arrival of “the new man”, the noughties celebrate the blurring of gender distinctions and the emergence of the so-called “metrosexual”. While these notions are certainly seductive, it is important to ask whether these fashionable terms translate into more substantive changes within the gender order. For instance, despite the arrival of the so-called “new man” over a decade ago in South Africa, high rates of rape have continued unabated and largely unchanged from 1998 to 2007 (Fast Facts, South African Institute of Race Relations, 2007). This paper seeks to be deliberately provocative, “troubling” the assumption underlying this special issue – namely, that South African masculinities are currently in a state of substantive reconstitution. Instead, we argue that little has changed from 1998 to the present – high rates of rape and violence continue (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2007), South African women continue to bear the brunt of the HIV pandemic (Brandt, 2006) and earn 45% of the income of South African men (*ibid*). Furthermore, we also argue that discourses heralding the rise of “alternative” or “transitional” masculinities are nothing new and show how men’s talk in 1998, while ostensibly *rejecting* “traditional” forms of masculinity ultimately worked to *re-inscribe* the centrality of “maleness” and masculinity. Very similar discursive patterns have recently been identified by Dewing (2007) in the talk of young, white South African men.

Thus, by introducing and reflecting on men’s talk about masculinity in 1998, this paper aims to ask a number of provocative questions about the very notion of “masculinities in transition”. While not intending to solve or neatly answer these questions, it is hoped that more serious scholars of “masculinity” will begin to reflect upon some of these issues.

FLAGGING THE PITFALLS OF “MASCULINITY” STUDIES.

The field of “masculinity studies” has emerged, both internationally and locally, as a productive and explosive area of research, with many books, articles and specialised journals devoted to exploring men and masculinities over the past two decades. The emergence of “masculinity” as a core problematic is however often positioned uneasily in relation to feminism, particularly since the “male crisis discourse” (Walker, 2005) which developed in the West during the 1960s and 1970s was largely a backlash reaction to the gains made by the feminist movement (Lemon, 1995). While a focus on “masculinity” remains important on several grounds, not least in destabilising the longstanding (privileged) invisibility of men as a sex, there are several dangers potentially associated with a specialised field of “masculinity studies” which stands apart from feminism (Macleod, 2005). According to Macleod (2005), who has provided a

critical reading of key South African texts on “masculinity”, these dangers include: the disappearance of the term patriarchy in favour of multiple, elusive and ever shifting “masculinities”, the tendency to fall back into the old phallogocentric trap of equating maleness and “masculinity” with being human (and thus inadvertently making women invisible and relegating them to the space of the non-human) and reinstating the male/female binary rather than deconstructing it.

Central to the disquiet we feel in relation to the South African “turn to masculinity” is the regular absence, within this literature, of mention or serious analysis of ideology and power relations in favour of micro-analyses of masculinity as identity, subjectivity or set of subject positions. While studies of male subjectivity are clearly vital, it is important to highlight that masculinity “is not a property of empirical men, but rather an ideology that takes the modern form of patriarchy” (Macleod, 2005:1). John MacInnes (1998:2) argues similarly that “masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of identity of individuals”. A troubling trend within the South African literature is, in our view, a growing tendency to reduce masculinity too readily to the level of individualist subjectivity (e.g. Morrell, 2001; Cooper, 2005; Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). While the recognition of plural forms of masculinities, an invigorated interest in the question of agency and the increasing fashionability of micro-analytic studies is, of course, directly related to the wider post-structuralist turn within the social sciences, it is important to note that an individualist theory of the subject often lies behind such seemingly progressive moves (Chadwick, 2007). In our view, one of the greatest challenges facing work on “masculinity”, particularly in psychology, is the development of a more sophisticated theory of subjectivity which is able to rework the ubiquitous individual/social dilemma, providing room for the acknowledgement of subjectivity as the product of tenuous relations *between* ideologies, social structures and “bodily-emotional” energies.

Coming broadly from a position of “resistance postmodernism” articulated by materialist feminists such as Teresa Ebert (1996), Rosemary Hennessy (1993) and Patrice DiQuinzio (1999), we remain critical of work which reduces the problematics of gender, femininity and masculinity to the realm of individualist versions of subjectivity. Individualist models of the subject assume a rational, self-determining, independent human agent whose agency is not determined by social contexts or relations but by an “essential capacity for rational autonomy” (DiQuinzio, 1999:9). Ideology, power relations, culture and society are therefore constructed as external to the individual human agent, who has the power to consciously transform or subvert social and ideological constraints. Drawing on the work of materialist feminists and the post-Lacanian theories of Julia Kristeva, we understand subjectivity as a paradoxical and always unstable movement *between* bodily energies (the semiotic), societal constraints and ideologies. The human subject is thus *overdetermined* and constituted by multiple, often contrary, ideological and textual processes. By ideologies we mean discursive formations which work to “systematize, rationalize, and justify particular material conditions” (DiQuinzio, 1999:2).

Despite the publication of several valuable articles and books trying to grapple with the issue of “masculinity” in South Africa, it seems that the contested theoretical concepts necessarily underpinning such work, for example: subjectivity, agency, ideology and “masculinity” itself, often remain ill-defined and conceptually underdeveloped. As a result, “masculinity” becomes (among other things) “a specific gender identity, belonging

to a specific male person" (Morrell, 2001:7), "something that can be deployed or used" (ibid:8) and "a performative social identity and subjectivity" (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007:27). Underlying these seemingly sensible definitions lie a range of hidden assumptions, including, for example: the naturalised association between being a biological male and "masculinity" and the existence of an individual agent who "owns" masculinity and has the power to consciously use or deploy masculinity in particular directions. As provocatively asked by MacInnes (1998:61), "what is male about masculinity?" We might also ask whether the hidden assumption of the individualist subject provides the best template for a nuanced analysis of "masculinities". These are the sorts of difficult questions that require conceptual tackling in the interests of framing empirical studies of South African men and "masculinities" in more useful directions.

QUESTIONING MASCULINITIES "IN TRANSITION".

The recent rhetoric whereby South African "masculinities" are being constructed as in transition, crisis mode or undergoing substantial redefinition (see Morrell, 2001; Walker, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005) is itself implicated in various problematic conceptual quagmires. First, the "troubled, unsettled world of [South African] masculinity" (Reid & Walker, 2005:2) needs to be placed within its global context. While clearly shaped by particular local currents and material conditions, the "male crisis discourse" (Walker, 2005) is a global one, deeply intertwined with the rise of new forms of (global) economy and the shift to new forms of patriarchal capitalism. According to MacInnes (1998:45), it needs to be understood that the "invention of masculinity" occurred in a particular historical frame, coinciding with the shift from naturalised male dominance to modern understandings of gender equality. The very concept of "masculinity" thus *only became salient* when longstanding forms of patriarchal power (historically accorded to men by virtue of their sex) were threatened by the rise of modernity and concomitant ideals of equality and universalism (ibid). Furthermore, "since this invention of masculinity was essentially a holding operation ... it has been in crisis ever since" (ibid:45). The "crisis" that "masculinities" are experiencing in South Africa (and across the globe) is therefore, from a feminist perspective, a positive sign, indicating that traditional forms of patriarchy are under threat. The current fanfare accompanying the analysis and interpretation of multiple and ever shifting "masculinities" needs to be treated with some caution, particularly if we take seriously MacInnes' argument that the very notion of "masculinity" only emerged as a way of consolidating male power. It is also worth remembering Macleod's (2005) disturbing realisation that while masculinity is endlessly fractured and multiplied, it is never *undone* within the South African literature.

It is in this context that increasing talk of "new", alternative and shifting masculinities needs to be understood and critiqued. According to MacInnes (1998:47) it is misplaced to strive for the redefinition of masculinity as the goal of a transgressive gender politics; it is, instead, in his view, "time for the end of masculinity". Arguing that "masculinity" exists only as a collection of ideological fantasies and story lines – and is never a matter of individual identity – MacInnes challenges the increasingly popular idea that men can (and should) somehow reform their masculinities. The idea that South African men are currently redefining masculinity and constructing "new masculinities" (Walker, 2005) pervades the recent rhetoric of "transitional" masculinities within the South African context. It is at this point that dangerous slippages between the terms "men" and "masculinities" become evident. While researchers within masculinity studies have repeatedly insisted upon the recognition of multiple masculinities, for example, according to Morrell (2001:4), "men differ – not all have the same masculinity", it is often

in this move that the problematic tendency to reduce masculinity to the behaviour or “inner subjectivity” of individual men becomes apparent. This slippage is particularly prevalent within South African studies and commentaries vis-à-vis masculinity (e.g. see Morrell, 2001; Cooper, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005; Walker, 2005; Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007). While studies of individual men are no doubt crucial, it needs to be asked whether the muddled conflation between “men” and “masculinity” serves transgressive gender politics or works to ultimately confuse and confound a more serious engagement with a politics of equal rights between the sexes (MacInnes, 1998).

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MASCULINITY: AN ANALYSIS OF WHITE MEN’S TALK .

In 1998, the first author completed a small piece of research in which eleven young, white, heterosexual men were interviewed. The men ranged in age from 20 to 25 years. Three men were postgraduate students, five were undergraduates and the remaining three participants had completed degrees and were employed. Two of the participants were married. Ten of the interviewees were known to the first author (who was also the interviewer) prior to the interview, with the degree of involvement ranging from that of acquaintance to close friend. All eleven participants expressed a willingness to talk about masculinity, with some emphasising the importance of the topic. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which ranged from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Questions centred around men’s understandings of masculinity, tried to gauge whether a “crisis” in masculinity existed and (if so) how men discursively negotiated current changes and destabilisation in cultural meanings of white masculinity. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed (with written consent) and analysed via discourse analysis (Parker, 1992). In reanalysing the data, a rhetorical mode of analysis (Billig, 1991) was also used.

The goal of the research was thus chiefly to explore how men themselves defined, negotiated and talked about “masculinity”. An overwhelming feature of the interviews was the difficulty that men had in reaching a clear definition of what exactly was meant by “masculinity”. While clearly assumed to be a real and familiar thing, masculinity also emerged as impossibly obscure and elusive. As a result, there was little consensus among the men regarding a definition of “masculinity” per se. Instead, discourse about masculinity invariably collapsed into talk of related yet distinct notions such as “being a man”, “macho”, traditional masculinity and “the new man”. However, despite splintering into a discussion of a multiplicity of “masculinities”, men’s talk remained, in general, committed to upholding (rather than undoing) the notion of “masculinity”. The reconsolidation of “masculinity” was achieved via the deployment of various rhetorical strategies, which will be outlined below.

However, before doing so it is important to note that all of the participants spoke of a shifting societal context which was challenging (or threatening) normative versions of “maleness” and “masculinity”. In significant ways, the discourse emerging in interviews can be seen as the responses of these (white, heterosexual) men to a climate of transition. However, contrary to assertions that post-apartheid upheavals have “[given] rise to new and contested masculine identities” (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007:26), most men interviewed were adamant that men themselves remained largely *unchanged*; shifts in the meanings attached to “masculinity” were thus generally ascribed to outside forces, such as, for example, society or women. Furthermore, while certain versions of traditional or hegemonic masculinity were eschewed and “othered”, almost all of the interviewees displayed a strong attachment to the continued existence

of something (which they could not define) called “masculinity”. Most participants thus worked hard to resuscitate the idea of “masculinity”, utilising various discursive strategies in the process. The findings of this study concur strongly with the recent work of Dewing (2007:81), who found (using a similar sample) that while most of the men interviewed devalued and eschewed “macho” versions of masculinity, they simultaneously continued to position themselves “in close alignment with the characteristics of Western hegemonic masculinity”.

Setting up the straw man: Othering “the macho man”.

The majority of men interviewed went to considerable lengths to distance themselves from stereotypical versions of masculinity. In these efforts, “the traditional macho man” emerged as a key trope and was often derided, mocked and constructed as contemptible other. For example, the macho man was variously described as psychologically “damaged”, belonging to a “bygone” era, a “Neanderthal” and a prehistoric relic of the past. Caricatured as, for example, “the rugby player” or “a Boer”, the “traditional macho man” emerged as a useful “straw man” against which participants could begin to construct alternative versions of masculinity. Responding to a social climate in which men are subjected to an increased critical gaze and denounced as, for example, “fossils” or “chauvinist pigs” (see Morrell, 2001), setting up the “traditional macho man” as other allowed interviewees to project the rising negativity associated with masculinity onto this other. For example:

Vince: “That’s their culture, I mean they would lose their identity without that (...) and the whole ‘the moffie’ and ‘I’m a real man – I’m strong’ you know, culture of rugby and beer and um slavery of women, you know, that’s a hard identity to break down ...”

For some participants it was important to distinguish between being “macho” and being “masculine”, so that “masculinity” itself could be rescued and cast in a more positive light.

James: “I don’t find macho masculine, to me, macho is not masculine, to me macho always deals with like psychological shit, you know, ‘what’s going on in your life?’, so it’s not a sign of masculinity to me (...) you must understand that to me, when I think of masculinity, um, I mean, I think it’s a good thing () masculinity, I really do ...”*

Ridiculing and splitting off the “traditional macho man” as maligned other constituted an important rhetorical strategy allowing participants the discursive space to begin the work of rearticulating “masculinity” in alternative and potentially more progressive directions. However, as we demonstrate below, these re-articulations were often not emancipatory but rather worked to re-entrench essentialism and naturalised differences between men and women.

Re-articulating a male essence.

While the majority of participants distanced themselves from traditional, macho versions of masculinity, almost all continued to stress the importance of differences between men and women. Similar to earlier findings by Kaminer & Dixon (1995) and Harris, Lea & Foster (1995), an essentialist discourse of gender, in which sex/gender differences are constructed as innate, natural and universal, dominated the talk of these young South African men. For example:

Dwayne: "They're [men and women] definitely different. Different goals in life, different views, different ways of thinking about things, definitely. Very different. (...) They're just () it's different, totally different (**) The thing is at the end of the day women can argue themselves out of anything but they can't (*) if it gets down to physicalities and things, they can't do anything about it, you know (*) I think women are generally just weaker than men."*

Thus, while many of the interviewees were critical of blatant forms of machismo, almost all were committed to holding onto a stable notion of maleness or masculinity which could stand apart from femininity. Further, while all of the participants spoke of challenges to traditional meanings of masculinity, most constructed change and redefinition as *external* to men themselves. These men were therefore overwhelmingly engaged in reconsolidating, via their talk, the idea of a stable and essential "manhood" or masculinity which stood relatively unchanged by context or time. Not surprisingly, the notion of a "new man" of sensitivity (popularised in the 1990s) was thus not embraced by the participants. Instead, the idea of the "essentially sensitive man" was evoked by some interviewees as a way of arguing that all men are (and always have been) inherently sensitive. The sensitive man was thus not constructed as a recent invention (or transition) but as a transhistorical, fixed truth; male "softness" or sensitivity was rearticulated as something that's "just always been around" (Matthew) but had not been allowed free expression in the past.

While some constructed men as innately and transhistorically sensitive, others were scathing of so-called male "softness" and reproduced the notion of the "essentially masculine man" who remained inherently unaffected by shifting gender roles. According to this discursive move, changes in masculinity were seen as merely superficial. Furthermore, men were cast as calculating, manipulative and powerful – faking change and sensitivity in the interests of attracting women solely for the purposes of sexual conquest. According to one participant:

*Dwayne: "So we do whatever we have to, so if masculinity means we have to find a soft side, then ja (**) the new man of sensitivity is a myth (*) it's a myth, he is for ten minutes to get a woman and then he is no longer (laughs)."*

For many of the men, the essentialist notion of "being a man" remained critically important in the context of changing concepts of "masculinity". For example:

James: "I'll tell you what I think is very important, I think, you know () okay, I understand that's the gist of your interview, is masculinity, but, for me, I mean, I have no problem with being a man, um, and in fact I think it is quite important to (*) recognise the fact that you are male, and that makes you different from a woman..."*

Many of the interviewees spoke of the value of bonding with other men in the interests of affirming the importance of an essential manhood. Considering the many historically powerful forms of male-only groups or collectivities, it is interesting that several participants felt that opportunities or avenues for male bonding had either been withheld in the past (by patriarchal society) or were being threatened in the present by changing gender roles and "women's liberation". Most interviewees wanted to create spaces where men "could be men" together and do "manly" things apart from women. Thus, while acknowledging the shifting and elusive nature of masculinity, interviewees

repeatedly evoked the essentialist idea of “being a man” as a way of reiterating the innate, biological and stable differences between men and women. Thus, despite varying in the extent to which a traditional (largely unequal) gender order was upheld as ideal, almost all of the participants continued to insist on essential differences between the sexes. Some were careful to qualify such statements, stressing that while gender *difference* was universal and innate, this did not mean that the sexes were *unequal*. Interestingly, it was the two married men within the study who were the most openly in favour of the reconsolidation of “traditional” values and gender roles. The discourse of these men thus reverberated with the desire to reclaim traditional forms of masculinity. For example:

Dwayne: “... maybe men aren’t supposed to do all that rubbish [childcare, domestic chores] () I don’t mean it like that, but I don’t know, it’s difficult, you know, maybe we are all trying to do these things and change these things, and they were like there for a reason.*

Despite differing in their orientation towards traditional masculinity (with some eschewing it and others seeking to reclaim it), the men remained largely united in their insistence upon innate, universal sex differences and their commitment to an essential, unchanging manhood.

Positioning women as powerful.

As mentioned, there was an overwhelming tendency in men’s talk to construct shifts in “masculinity” as imposed from the outside, with society at large or women seen as the primary determinants of change. Several participants fingered women as the key players in determining the shape or characteristics of “masculinity”, thereby (to some degree) absolving men from responsibility for gender relations. Men thus often (conveniently) emerged as powerless pawns in constructions of ideal or normative versions of masculinity and were depicted as prey to the whims of women. As one participant put it, “you can’t just be a chest-pounding, rugby-playing, steroid-pumping guy” if you want to attract women. Perhaps as a result of the heterosexual orientation of the sample, women were often constructed as *powerful* within men’s talk. For example:

*James: “They [men] are trying to become more in tune with a woman’s needs (**) they think that if they’re too crass or too (*) cold, they’ll never find a happy relationship with a woman (*) and they definitely try to (*) cause women are so manipulative you see (laughs).”*

*Trevor: “It annoys me actually, women always have the power, there’s no jokes about it, she always (**) the truth is a man won’t be able to do anything a woman doesn’t want him to do.”*

Thus, similarly to the finding by Harris, Lea & Foster (1995), men often resorted to discursively turning the tables (so to speak), constructing women as the ultimate power players in determining the nature of relations between the sexes; men were often constructed as merely responsive to female desires and whims. In this way, “masculinity” emerged as something modelled on women’s desires. As a result, contemporary shifts in masculinity remained construed as external to men, often featuring merely as what a (heterosexual) man has to do in order to “get” a woman. In

this way, the belief in an essential and unchanging masculine core remained intact in the face of transition and redefinition.

Towards the end of “masculinity”: A progressive move.

While discursive efforts (via the above rhetorical strategies) to reaffirm an essential masculinity dominated the interviews, there was evidence of a small (but discernable) dissenting voice which advocated the radical and total eradication of “masculinity”. Thus, nascent in the talk of a few interviewees was the first stirrings of a movement away from “masculinity”. In this move, “masculinity” was not something to be redefined or reclaimed but became, instead, that which needed to be transcended. Evident in the talk of three of the men interviewed, this discursive move was characterised by an embrace of transition, flexibility and the reconfiguration of gender relations. Notions such as “femininity” and “masculinity” were eschewed in the interests of resisting definition or categorization and people were constructed as human persons not reducible to physical sex or gender stereotypes. For example:

Vince: “I mean I would hope that masculine and feminine would fade away, and it would just be like a mix of what you are, at this moment in time, breaking down the () what is called the hard male, the soft female, it’s um, there you have to look at issues like masculinity and femininity and try and break them down from there, but essentially I don’t feel there is such a difference (**) it’s a human thing – no offence to other species ...”*

Ron: “What they should do is move away from like masculinity to like humanism almost, where you become like just a person relating to everyone else on an equal level.”

Blurring the boundaries between femininity and masculinity, this move was associated with a rejection of essentialism and the notion of natural differences between the sexes. Significantly, the call for an end to “masculinity” also coincided with the direct *acknowledgement* of male power and the historical oppression of women. For example:

*Shane: “... we have lived thousands of years with a male-dominated history, a male-dominated ideological base, and a male-dominated whatever base (**) women are saying, you know, ‘Fuck, we are here and we live and we have a lot that we need and a lot that we want’– bullshit men are emotionally powerless, men may be emotionally whatever, but that’s, we’ve had far more space than women, and that oppression is a space that we have subscribed to and a space that we have perpetuated, and to point fingers anywhere is just wrong (**) the situation that, kind of, psychologically, say aetiologically predisposes this notion of men being oppressed is one that men have created, and one that men have embraced for a long, long time ...”*

Interestingly, the most progressive strands of men’s talk thus often rode alongside a call for, as MacInnes (1998:47) puts it, “the end of masculinity”. Importantly, this signals that it is often with the rejection (rather than redefinition) of “masculinity” that progressive spaces begin to materialise. Furthermore, it is significant that the effort to redefine or rearticulate masculinity (which dominated the majority of interviews) was almost always linked to a reiteration of essentialism and innate gender difference.

CONCLUSION.

By focussing on the negotiation and reproduction of “masculinity” within the talk of young, white, heterosexual men in 1998, this paper raises questions about the notion that South African masculinities are currently “in transition”. While the “new man” of the nineties has been replaced by the “metrosexual” of the noughties and gender relations are clearly still undergoing challenging local and global upheavals, the data outlined in this article suggests that talk about “masculinity” often works to ultimately *reaffirm* rather than *undo* male power. Thus, despite the fact that participants valiantly tried to redefine masculinity in alternative ways, these re-articulations invariably worked to reproduce the idea of natural, innate differences between the sexes, to bolster the notion of an essential, immutable male core and to silence issues relating to gender oppression, institutionalised forms of male power and violence. Progressive strands of discourse seeking to shatter stereotypical understandings of sex/gender and give voice to the historical legacy of patriarchy were, interestingly, deeply intertwined with the minority call declaring that: “it is time for the end of masculinity” (MacInnes, 1998:47). This paper thus questions the merits of pursuing a *redefinition* of masculinity as the end-goal of a progressive gender politics. It should also be read as a cautionary note to scholars who reduce “masculinity” too readily to the realm of individual men and subjectivity. In the words of MacInnes (1998:149): “Rather than writing manifestos for masculine or feminine selves, which hold out the illusory prospect of finding a path to wholeness, integration and freedom from anxiety, limit or disappointment, we should pay more attention to equalizing the material contexts of the development of males and females.”

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