

Editorial

Problematizing masculinity: towards an investigative and interdisciplinary texture of the problem

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Not all questions about the present are strictly new or young. Some questions remain relevant because the knowledge we have constructed fails to fully answer them; or because what they challenge remains an unresolved problem, a situation to be addressed, or a horizon of transformation yet to be realized.

The question of masculinity has these characteristics. Its emergence dates back to the 1960s and the epistemological and political tensions of feminism, the civil rights movement in the United States, protests against the Vietnam War, and the rise of decolonial theories (Armengol, 2022; Martínez Hoyos & Carmona Parra, 2023). However, despite the years that have passed, it remains a necessary problem, as what we know about men and their experience of masculinity offers some insights but, above all, reveals many urgent issues.

These urgencies are varied. They range from understanding and acting to eliminate all gender gaps in economic, political, academic, and health spheres. Additionally, they include persistent issues such as gender-based violence and violence against women in its symbolic, patrimonial, and physical forms, culminating in its extreme expression: femicide.

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However, the problematization of gender studies and the development of men's and masculinities studies broaden the investigative landscape. New questions arise about how the construction of male subjectivity, structured by social, normative, and cultural values, also limits men's overall experience.

As Elizabeth Gómez-Etayo (2014) mentions, masculinity studies not only involve the situated analysis of what it means to be a man but also the incorporation of other marginalized or alternative expressions, as well as an examination of the consequences that certain gender mandates have for both men and women.

This approach leads to a relational investigation—an inquiry that involves tracing masculinity in all possible directions. It follows the trajectories of hegemonic male norms, such as the Western model, and their impact on how men relate to themselves, to other men, to women, and to individuals who express and live diverse identities and sexual orientations.

Research pathways also share the characteristics of complex problems. The goal is not to reduce the question of masculinity to a simple characterization of factors. Instead, the aim is to weave connections that enable powerful understandings—ones that allow social and psychological knowledge to materialize into real experiences.

Current knowledge about masculinity presents a starting point in this regard. Today, we know that when we talk about men, we refer to an entire network where different domains of human experience intersect. Being a man is not something separate from socioeconomic conditions and determinants (De Keijzer et al., 2023). Nor is it independent of the networks of influences that shape social and subjective life. Thus, the answer, from an investigative perspective, does not lie in a single disciplinary voice but in the open and democratic forum of interdisciplinary dialogue (Maldonado, 2015).

This is where the present and future of gender and masculinity studies reside: in the search for and construction of knowledge that resembles a tapestry—a fabric of rigorously and fundamentally gathered insights that contribute to understanding issues such as masculinity and mental health, work, education, fatherhood, and, of course, violence, both inter-gender (against women and feminized individuals) and intra-gender, which disciplines men who do not conform to the dominant masculinity model.

In this framework, perspectives on men do not take a single form. They do not conform to demonic visions, nor to victimizing silhouettes. The goal is not to erect a hall of condemnation where all male experiences are grouped and treated as

identical. Nor is it to assume a central position that monopolizes the discourse on men, reaffirming past exclusions and preventing a critical examination of men's role in perpetuating certain inequalities and injustices.

This is why the proposal to problematize masculinity makes sense. Problematizing involves addressing three key aspects: tracing paths, recognizing places, and generating encounters. The first entails insisting on intersections—complicating our questions about masculinity by incorporating as many relationships as possible into the investigative exercise for a better understanding. This materializes through a diversified perspective, pursuing a complex network of influences where the question of masculinity connects with other domains of interest (biological, anthropological, social, political, economic, etc.).

The second, recognizing places, involves creating space for alternative perspectives—for the diverse ways of experiencing masculinity that allow us to question what generates problems and promote what fosters well-being for men and those around them. It means recognizing and understanding the mechanisms that produce masculinities that may be problematic for all, including men. However, it is also an invitation to examine the fissures—those masculine expressions that, due to the diversity of human and natural experience, offer desirable and powerful action horizons.

The third moment, generating encounters, represents an ethical commitment in masculinity research. It is aimed at producing alliances, cooperative, and collaborative work that reaffirms the generative value of knowledge—that is, enabling the creation of alternative ways of shaping ourselves as subjects. These approaches should aim for subjective and social well-being, grounded in rigorous and conscious action that serves as an incentive to evolve with others in the pursuit of a good and better collective life.

These moments converge in the investigative task and should also be a fundamental component of all academic work. Researching masculinity, in the terms of this text, means continuing to address the problem of men. It means problematizing masculinity by tracing paths, recognizing places, and generating encounters for well-being and freedom.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest with any institution or commercial association of any kind.

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