

**Cross-Disciplinary Learning and Teaching Initiative
Masculinity Studies Workshop, Spring 2011
Final Report**

Workshop Participants:

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Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson
Melissa Wilcox
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Summary of Proposal:

This workshop will focus on the multiple and contested meanings of masculinity. It asks: What are the origins of masculinity studies? What contexts does masculinity studies emerge from and respond to? That is, what perceived limitations does it seek to rectify? How does it relate to other subfields in gender studies? For example, what is its relation to feminist studies? Is the construction of the male body any more (or less) ideological than that of the female body? If not, how can we address the ideological dimensions of both bodies without simultaneously flattening their different genealogies – or, for that matter, the diversity of male bodies as inflected by race, class, sexuality, nationality, and other axes of power?

Final Syllabus:

- Week 1: Genealogies of Western Masculinities - Kimmel and Messner (eds.), *Men's Lives* (8th ed., 2009)
- Week 2: Western Masculinities and Feminism - Murphy (ed.), *Feminism and Masculinities* (2004)
- Week 3: Non-Western Masculinities - Gutmann, *Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control, and AIDS in Mexico* (2007)
- Week 4: Non-Western Masculinities - Bannerjee, *Make Me a Man: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (2005)
- Week 5: Non-Western Masculinities - Hope, *Man Vibes: Masculinities in Jamaican Dancehall* (2010)
- Week 6: Female Masculinities - Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998)
- Week 7: Male Femininities - Gaudio, *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City* (2009)

Note: This syllabus represents a slight change from our proposal, in that the final film (*Amores Perros*) was canceled. Travel plans on the part of several workshop participants prevented our viewing the film together during week 8 of the semester, or during the first two weeks after spring break. After those weeks, senior theses and other end-of-semester duties became prohibitively time-consuming, and travel plans again prevented us from meeting at the beginning of the summer. We did, however, complete all of the books we had assigned ourselves, and because we often ran overtime at our meetings, we met for all of the required hours.

Selected Commentaries from Participants:

Suzanne Morrissey: I had the option of participating in one of two workshops in Spring 2011 and am very happy that I chose Masculinity Studies for a number of reasons. First, although I didn't

meet anyone new in my group, the depth of our interactions were greater than usual and gave me a good sense of the work that each one does, both in terms of individual research interests and the course material that they teach. For example, Nohemy Solorzano-Thompson often highlighted film and performance art material that would complement the texts we chose to read; Nohemy gave excellent suggestions for punctuating course lectures with alternative material that I will use in the future. Second, the texts that we read were well chosen -- they grounded us in the historical development of masculinity studies while being broad in scope. In particular, we were exposed to multiple theoretical threads woven through studies of varied geographic and empirical topics. Especially moving for me was Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, in which she questions why masculinity is reserved for men. Why, even though she presents herself as masculine, is hers considered an 'ambiguous' gender? Instead, Halberstam argues that 'masculine' extends beyond the male body, a concept that made perfect sense to me but one that I had not considered until I read her book. Repeatedly in my evaluations for Introduction to Gender Studies, students bemoan an imbalance between feminism and masculinity studies -- that there is too much of the former and not enough of the latter. My colleagues in the workshop gave me space to think about ways to correct that imbalance in the future. Indeed, since I was teaching the introductory class while we were doing our workshop, I was able to draw on the workshop discussions for my lectures. Lastly, each one of my colleagues brought specific expertise and varying life experiences to the material we covered, which left me excited from one meeting to the next to spend time with them, to learn from them, to bounce my ideas off them.

Nicole Simek: My experience in the interdisciplinary workshop on masculinities this semester was very rewarding in several ways. Most concretely, the workshop helped me better conceptualize a unit on gender and sexuality in my French 316 course, a cross-disciplinary course that seeks to introduce students to the study of cultural difference and that I teach regularly. Having deepened my familiarity with gender studies concepts broadly, and the study of masculinities more specifically, the workshop helped me improve in-class discussion, and the papers that students produced, first by allowing me to better situate the materials I teach in this unit in a historical context. Among the wide range of topics we studied, I found our workshop conversations about intersectionality, violence, and the visibility of gender identities (how various identities come to be made visible, or not) particularly helpful as I sought to formulate more precise and effective discussion questions for my class about cultural representations of masculinities, questions designed to help students recognize and analyze the multiple, complementary and competing models of masculinity (and of gender identities more generally) presented in the texts and films on our syllabus, and the specific cultural, ethnic, and class contexts in which these models emerge. The workshop—particularly our reading and discussion of Sikata Banerjee's *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*, a work that provided models for relating colonial and postcolonial practices—will also be useful to my research in French Caribbean literature, a field of study that has long attended to the various ways in which women are represented, but which has only recently begun to explore the construction of masculinities in the plural (as opposed to a more binary study of masculinity as opposed to femininity). Finally, I found the opportunity to read and discuss a range of stimulating materials with a group of dedicated colleagues extremely energizing and motivating. I really looked forward to our Monday afternoon sessions this semester and always felt

intellectually and personally refreshed in a way that is difficult to quantify, but which certainly had and will continue to have a positive impact on my overall life at Whitman.

Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson: I enjoyed participating in this cross-disciplinary workshop on masculinity immensely. It provided a unique opportunity to discuss relevant texts (many of which I had not studied before) with a group of colleagues interested in the subject, but approaching it from different disciplines, backgrounds, and pedagogical directions. The meetings were most useful when we all brought our own questions and interpretations and then discussed them with each other. Many of the readings and discussions helped me think about my spring 2012 course on Queer Iberian Literature and Film - as they provided nuanced arguments and case studies about the construction of gender and sexuality worldwide. This workshop reminded me of how essential to our work as teacher-scholars is to engage with colleagues across disciplines and departments. I learnt a lot about other ways of teaching and researching knowledge which I hope to integrate to all my courses in the future. This productive set of meetings was the highlight of my spring semester and I hope to participate in similar intellectual exchanges in the future, as they are essential to faculty development.

Topic wise, I became more familiar with general Western conceptions of masculinity and sexuality which were then coupled with global case studies that destabilized the supposed "universality" of those established Western notions. Masculinity emerged as a culturally-defined and complex set of performances and processes that emerge through human interactions, power exchanges, and ideologies. Of note was the book by J. Halberstam on *Female Masculinity*, as it separated gender identity from biology through a very well observed reading of female performances of masculinity in 19th and 20th century Europe and the US. I also enjoyed readings that teased out the connection between masculinity and nationalism (especially as explored in those readings about non-Western societies, for example, India, Mexico, Jamaica, and Nigeria).

Melissa Wilcox: For me this workshop was absolutely invaluable. I have a very well-subscribed course on Masculinity Studies on the books for the fall, and after our workshop I decided to assign several of the books we had read and discussed. Our discussions helped me not only to decide which books would be the most useful, but also gave me ideas for using these books in the classroom and a variety of perspectives on each book to bring into class discussion. The informal format of our meetings was enjoyable, collegial, and definitely conducive to intellectual development: we were able to discuss each book freely and thoughtfully, learning from and responding to each other's perspectives. I thoroughly enjoyed the masculinity studies workshop and found it quite conducive to the improvement of my teaching.

Zahi Zalloua: Participating in this workshop has made me a far better interpreter of masculinity. While inextricably connected to questions of femininity, a sustained meditation on masculinity—across an array of fields within the humanities and the social sciences—has helped me cultivate a more sensitive eye for the construction of masculine subjects. I see a clear and immediate impact for my future course offerings. I will be teaching a course on French Feminism in the upcoming spring; in it, I plan to give far greater attention to the ways male authors/narrators/poets fashion their masculinity through their self-representation whereas in the past my focus has tended to be on the misogynistic universes constructed and/or undermined by a variety of authors. Yet, as the works on the relation between feminism and masculinity studies

aply demonstrated, a concern for masculinity and a feminist approach are by no means mutually exclusive: they often complement one another. In teaching my course on French Feminism, I plan to explore the elusive meaning(s) of male subjectivities; how a number of (male and female) authors problematized a one-dimensional view of masculinity; how the passivity or paralysis of male characters is not easily translatable into the language of feminization. I am interested in pursuing similar questions in my world literature course, Contemporary Literary Theory (which typically attracts students from many departments and interdisciplinary programs). I also see the problematic of masculinity as a potentially very fruitful topic when I examine discourses about male friendship in the French Renaissance. For instance, I have in the past interpreted sixteenth-century author Michel de Montaigne as proposing an alternative model to the dominant (virile) vision of male friendship espoused by so many of his humanist contemporaries. I am now eager to pursue this question from a different angle next time I offer the course. Even this past semester, I've already benefited from the workshop's readings and discussions. In my encounters course (an ideal occasion for students to develop a cross-disciplinary interpretive skills), I found myself attending more and more closely to the interconnections between sexuality, power, and identity in Plato's *Symposium*, Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and Morrison's *Beloved* than I had done in the past. And many students responded well to these challenges. By working to foreground more effectively the problematic of masculinity in my Encounters and French literature courses, I hope to convey to my students (first year students, French and Gender Studies majors) the intellectual benefits of pursuing cross-disciplinary thinking.