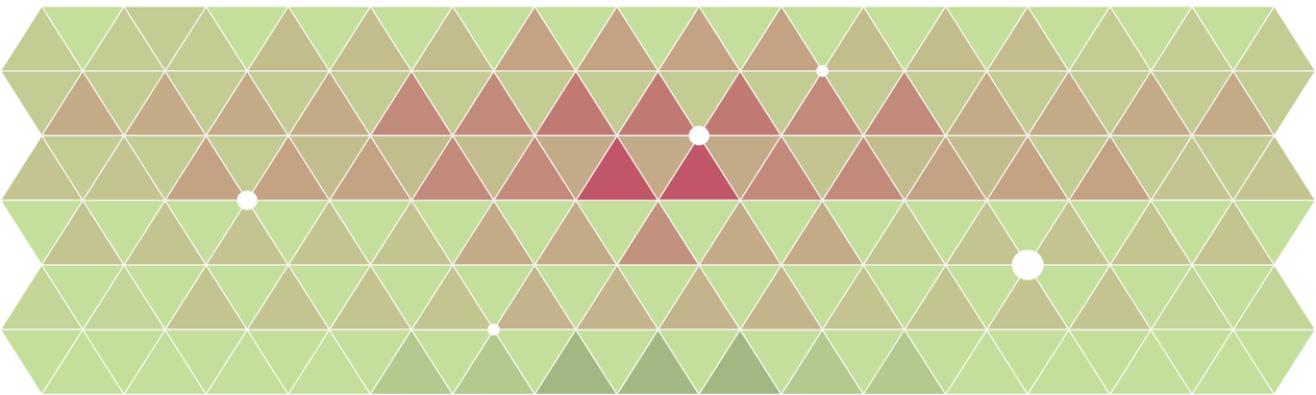


GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE

WHAT ARE MASCULINITIES?





BY EMILIA PERUJO

This edition of *Guidelines for Debate* has a double goal: to introduce what we mean when we talk about masculinities within the framework of gender studies, and to stimulate reflections about some of the topics related to the programs and work with men. For those purposes, this guide offers a series of dynamics that, on the one hand, promote the recognition of diversity, and on the other, the possibilities of action for both new masculinities and policies directed to or elaborated with men.

The aim of the series **GUIDELINES FOR DEBATE is to influence the formulation, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies through guidelines that foster the debate of ideas from a progressive approach. The collection features a cool exchange of data and theoretical and methodological tools for analysis and action aimed at emerging political generations.**



OFF WE GO

Masculinity studies are a field which involves multiple disciplines and was consolidated in the eighties. They emerged in countries such as the United States, in the context of men's movements –with their two approaches: one looking for the re-appropriation of masculine spaces, privileges and the mytho-poetic men, in reaction to women's rights; and the other, men's groups that questioned their individual experiences of power and privilege¹ and academic feminism, which by then had already elaborated theories and analytic categories for gender studies, questioning inequality.² Since the beginning, men's and masculinity studies have been related to social change. Their primary goal was "to study men as men", not considering them as the universal representatives of Humanity, but focusing on their differences and their relationships with women, their environment, and between themselves throughout history.³

As is with many categories, *masculinity* has been defined from different perspectives. In this edition of Guidelines for Debate we will consider masculinity in three dimensions: **1** as a position in gender relations (highlighting that it exists in relation to femininity and is part of a broader structure), **2** as the practices through which men identify and engage with the above mentioned position and, finally, **3** as the effects those practices have in bodily experiences, personality and society.⁴

Masculinities are not static, as they situate in particular scenarios –where, at the same time, different masculinities can be found–and depend on the relationships between men, as well as on the relationships between men and women.⁵

Since the concern and central commitment of gender studies is to critique the differentiation where inequality is constructed, masculinities are observed regarding the positions and the dynamics of men within their social class, ethnic groups, age, and their relation to dominant gender models.

DYNAMIC 1

Gather a group of **10 to 20** people interested in finding out about and reflect on **MASCULINITY**. Prepare a room or open space where cardboard cards, a wall to place them, markers and adhesive tape or tacks are available.

Hand in several cards to each participant. Ask them to **BRAINSTORM** ideas of what it means to be **A MAN** from their point of view. Ask the group to write **ONE IDEA** per card, clear and readable, so that it can be easily read when placed **ON THE WALL**.

Pick up **ALL THE CARDS** and place them on the wall using adhesive tape or tacks. They will be read aloud to **EXCHANGE IDEAS** and try to put together the group's own definition of what it means to be a man.

ON WE GO

As we can see, the definition of what it is to be a man is built taking into account many spheres of men's life such as their ways of acting, their activities, and our own perceptions of themselves. Although we usually start from **A STEREOTYPICAL MODEL**, there are diverse ways of being a man, and many notions about its meaning. This is why we usually talk about *masculinities*, not masculinity.

As we reflect on how we focus on masculinity, we also **QUESTION** certain male characteristics that have been constructed upon a patriarchal gender organization.

If the composition of the group is **HETEROGENEOUS** in terms of sex and gender, we can also consider how masculinities are perceived and constructed in relation to different individuals.

DYNAMIC 2

Prepare ahead **WHITE**, **BLUE** and **YELLOW** cardboard cards. On the white cards, you will describe a **CHARACTER** before the dynamic takes place. It is important to indicate age, sex, sexual orientation and practices, occupation, employment and health situation of your character. Provide as many descriptive **DETAILS** as possible. These cards will be grouped in pairs, considering the actual interaction possibilities of the chosen characters.

Use the **BLUE** cards to write down the **PLACES** where each pair of characters could interact (coffee shop, bar, home, waiting room, etc.). In the **YELLOW** cards, write down the **TOPICS** that will be addressed during the activity. Topics can be chosen according to the group's needs; some suggestions are: sexuality, health and self-care, fatherhood, emotional life, and work.

Here is an example:

SITUATION**WHITE CARD
(INDIVIDUAL)****BLUE CARD
(PER COUPLE)****YELLOW CARD
(PER COUPLE)****1****CHARACTER 1**

You are a heterosexual single young man who lives in a city. You moved in to study and you are in the last semester of your Bachelor's degree. Most of your friends are young students.

CHARACTER 2

You are a 40 year old man who lives in a city. You got married at 23 and divorced half a year ago. You have a stable and very demanding job.

PLACE

Coffee shop

TOPIC

Fatherhood

2**CHARACTER 1**

You are an indigenous adolescent who goes to school and works in a rural area. You have a girlfriend you have been dating for 6 months.

CHARACTER 2

You are a medicine student doing his social service in an indigenous community in Oaxaca. You are single and have been working at the local health clinic for three months.

PLACE

Health facility

TOPIC

Sexuality

The group will be divided in **COUPLES** and each person will receive a **WHITE CARD** with the character to be interpreted in the role-play. All couples will be asked to stand in front of the group and discuss a topic from the yellow cards **PRETENDING** to be in the place indicated in the blue cards; both cards **CAN BE CHOSEN** by each couple.

After the group finishes the role-play, promote **REFLECTIONS** around the group's observations regarding the different **INTERACTIONS** that took place during the dynamic and the topics that were covered. As we can see, there are topics that promote **EXPRESSION** and **EXCHANGE** between men, or between men and women, while others are not discussed easily. It is important to pay attention to the topics that are not **OPENLY** discussed among the male population (sometimes resulting in risks) and to the situations that represent **BARRIERS** for their analysis.

DYNAMIC 3

Hand in several cards to every participant. Ask the group to think about **NEW WAYS** of being a man based on the ideas they shared in the previous activity. Invite them to imagine men or male **MODELS** they do not know from their everyday lives or who in some way could **CHANGE** the definition elaborated by the group in the first dynamic.

Ask them to briefly **DESCRIBE** the new male models they imagined or thought about on the cardboards. Place all the cards on the wall, with adhesive tape or tacks, so the group can see them.

Organize the group in teams of **4** or **5** people to think about the advantages and disadvantages each new male model (among those proposed by the group) could encounter while developing in **DIFFERENT SOCIAL SCENARIOS**.

Once the exercise is over, ask the teams to **SHARE** their reflections with the rest of the group.

DYNAMIC 4

Ask the teams to think of a **GENDER PROGRAM** or **POLICY** that addresses the male population. Encourage an exchange of ideas on the topics they find or are **NOT CONSIDERED** in that program. Afterwards, the teams will **DESIGN** a program that promotes male **PARTICIPATION**, aimed at a specific population such as: rural adolescents, men that have sex with men, unemployed men, young couples, etc. Some topics that may be **SUGGESTED** are: male health care, responsible fatherhood, nonviolent relationships, sex education, drug use and abuse, etc. Other topics relevant for the group may also be considered. Each group will then **PRESENT** their program.

YOU CAN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE DISCUSSION:

- Is the program directed exclusively to men?
- Does it consider differences amongst the male population?
- How will it be applied? How will it be evaluated?
- Is it aimed at a group that is difficult to access or does it consider topics which have traditionally excluded the male population?
- Does the program promote new forms of masculinities or gender relations?
- How does the program articulate with inequalities between men and women? Does it benefit both groups?

At the end of the dynamics, ask the group to voluntarily share their conclusions. Promote a collective reflection on the **DIFFICULTIES** that might have been encountered during the interactions, while looking at the **ADVANTAGES** and **DISADVANTAGES** for new masculinities, and while making a gender program that addresses a male population.

From this debate, you can identify some of the topics that represent **CHALLENGES** for elaborating programs or policies developed with, or directed to, men and think about **CONCRETE RECOMMENDATIONS** and **PROPOSALS** that can help overcome the identified obstacles.

- How did you feel during the activities?
- Did your perceptions on what it is to be a man change? Have you ever reflected on the topic before?
- How many masculinities do you encounter in your daily life? How do you relate to them?

1. Kaufman, Michael (1994) Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power en Harry Brod y Michael Kaufman (Eds.) *Theorizing Masculinities*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications: 142-165.
2. To know more about gender perspective you can consult the Guideline for Debate: What Is Gender Perspective? <http://www.espolea.org/uploads/8/7/2/7/8727772/gped-en-perspectiva-de-genero.pdf>
3. Hernández, Óscar Misael. Debates y aportes en los estudios sobre masculinidades en México, *Relaciones* 116 (XXIX), Otoño 2008.
4. Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*, 2nd Ed., University of California Press, 2005:71.
6. Connell, R.W. & James W. Messerschmidt. Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept, *Gender and Society* 19 (6), 2005.
7. To prepare the dynamics you can consult the following link: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/99009552/The-10-Challenges-of-New-Masculinities>

The views expressed in the text, as well as the analyses and interpretations contained therein, have not been subjected to editorial review and are the sole responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views and stance of Espolea A.C.

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