Contesting Masculinity: Editor's Preface

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disClosure: a journal of social theory
no. 9 manholes
Contributors

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Mary Curran is writing a dissertation in the Department of Geography at the University of Kentucky.

Andrew Feight was born and raised in the suburbs of Atlanta and received his bachelor’s degree from Furman University in 1993. He is currently writing his dissertation in American History at the University of Kentucky.

Steve Giovinco has been photographing personal scenes for about ten years. He has an MFA in photography from Yale and has recently started working with digital cameras and web sites.

Chris Green writes, teaches, and reads poetry in central Kentucky to and for those community members who are working to recover their voices and sing about their realities. Recent poems have appeared in ACM (Another Chicago Magazine), Pudding, Artful Dodge, and Midwifery Today.

Wayne Hogan bounced around the South China Sea on an aircraft carrier during the Korean War. He is a three-time nominee for a Pushcart Prize for poetry and resident-illustrator-in-absentia for Kings Estate Press. He and his wife Susan live in Cookeville, Tennessee.

bell hooks is a Distinguished Professor of English and Graduate Studies at the City University of New York. She is the author of numerous books and essays, including her most recent work All About Love: New Visions.

Peter Jackson is a professor of Human Geography at the University of Sheffield, England. He is the author and editor of numerous books including his most recent work Shopping, Place and Identity co-authored with Daniel Miller, Nigel Thrift, Bev Holbrook and Michael Rowlands.

Paul Kingsbury is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Geography at the University of Kentucky and editor of disClosure #10: childhood.

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Pamela Mullins’s love of photography developed watching her father take pictures. She has a B.A. in Philosophy and Women’s Studies from DePaul University in Chicago and had completed master’s level coursework in Philosophy at the University of Kentucky before enrolling for a degree specializing in photography, printmaking, and sculpture at the Herron School of Art in Indianapolis. She is part of a studio collective showing art in the Indianapolis area.

Andrew Schopp is an assistant professor of English at the University of Tennessee Martin where he teaches 20th-century literatures, film, and cultural studies. He is currently working on two book projects: one, a study of fear and narrative; the other, an examination of the absent father and its impact on masculinity in contemporary American culture.

Melinda Spencer is a Ph.D. student in the Department of English at the University of Kentucky and an assistant editor of Limestone, a literary journal produced by the University of Kentucky Department of English.

Tara Susman is a Ph.D. student in cultural anthropology at Columbia University. She is currently working on state politics and African-based dance and religion in Cuba. In a previous life, she was a modern dancer and choreographer.

Chris Weinke is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. His current research interests include race, class, and gender studies, men’s studies, sociology of the family, fatherhood and parenting, and cultural studies. His dissertation will examine the social construction of fatherhood in community-based programs designed to increase men’s involvement in childcare.

Michael Velliquette received his BFA from Florida State University in
sculpture and video arts. For eight years, he has been making experimental video shorts exploring artifice, voyeurism, and surveillance that have recently been screened at film and video festivals across North America and Europe. He is currently an MFA candidate in the Department of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Christine Metzo

Contesting Masculinity

Editor’s Preface

...the excellent man, the admired man, is not necessarily a 'good' man is some abstract moral sense. Rather he is good at being a man. (Gilmore 36)

...insofar as anyone continues to occupy the category man it must be remade lest it continue to be oppressive to all of us who are not within that category, or who are not centrally or solidly within that category, whether we be women, men at the margins, or something other than women or men. (Hale 121)

On behalf of the editorial collective, I welcome you to manholes. As a journal dedicated to presenting multi- and interdisciplinary engagements with issues of social theory and cultural concern, disClosure seeks, with this ninth volume, to tackle masculinity. I am excited to share with you this look at masculinities in all their complexity, diversity, and contradiction. “Manholes” evokes numerous reactions, not least among them a certain puzzlement. In selecting a title, as always, we wanted to stimulate and provoke critical inquiry while capturing a
decentered reading of our topic, masculinity. The feigned “wholeness” of hegemonic modes of masculinity has a vast underbelly fragmented by its own contradictions. Masculinity, maleness, the male body are contested spaces; our attempts to give an account are incomplete and partial at best. The moments with which we concern ourselves in the pages which follow provide just a few points of entry into such an exploration. The work before us asks how the male body is a site of contested narrative, even in our naming it “male.” It asks how technologies recuperate phallic masculinities and compulsory heterosexuality. It asks how feminists and profeminists can reconfigure and transform our cultural expectations of boys and men.

We open with Andrew Schopp’s discussion of the heteronormative cultural investment in the mythology of the Absent Father. Perhaps counterintuitively, Schopp explores this mythical figure, and gay men’s relationship to it, for its potential to resist a hegemonic ideal of masculinity. He argues that in Daddy/Son roleplaying fantasy, a growing genre of gay male erotica, this mythical figure of heteronormative masculinity offers up a moment of self-critique, even while reinforcing its hegemonic power. The Absent Father is a conflicted and contradictory figure, which can help us understand the wounds inflicted by dominant ideals of masculinity.

Providing a different context for discussion of parents and sons, in disClosure’s first interview, bell hooks discusses feminism, popular culture, and her new visions of love and masculinity. She describes situations from her own experience which demonstrate the need for feminists to be not just active, but proactive in raising boys to cultivate identities outside the patriarchal masculine order which is so prevalent at the heart of much of our popular culture. Male violence sustains patriarchy, she claims. One must recognize this, and recognize it within these domains of pop culture, if patriarchal hierarchies are going to be dismantled and new masculinities are going to emerge.

One of the modes of transmission for patriarchal ideals of masculinity is medical literature discussing impotence treatment technology and how it can restore men’s sexual potency. Chris Weinke discusses the discourse of this medical literature and the implications of such treatment for men’s “naturally-occurring” sexual function. He notes the difficulty of a seeming contradiction in men’s need for assistance in the production of their phallic power. Weinke then advocates feminist theorists’ suggestion that we keep visible these contradictions in order to decenter the role of phallocentric sexuality in men’s and women’s lives.

We consume these discourses of phallic power and authority in so many ways. The second disClosure interview engages Peter Jackson and his work on geographies of advertising and consumption as they intersect with constructions of race, gender, and sexualities. He discusses the politics of the “new man” as having been a failed hope for a more progressive form of masculinity, which leads to a discussion of his current work on men’s lifestyle magazines.

These lifestyle magazines provide a glimpse of what has become a prevalent style for middle and upper class white men. Our final article explores the world of gay Balls in New York City, which provides a glimpse of very different lifestyles. Tara Susman argues that these Balls serve as a means of cultural and physical survival for many, through syncretic practices which provide a cultural memory distinct from a mainstream culture which is hostile. To demonstrate this, Susman discusses the role of performance and fashion in the Balls and the syncretism of gender and sexuality.

Also in this issue, continuing in disClosure’s tradition of including various artistic presentations of our theme, there are photographs, mixed media art, and digital stills represented as well as two poems included. Chris Green and Wayne Hogan provide thoughtful musings for readers to linger over. And our contributing photographers — Andrew Feight, Steve Giovinco, Amanda Lewis, Pamela Mullins, and Michael Velliquette — experiment with the male body, providing critiques and parodies of various dominant expressions of masculinity. A special treat is the inclusion of Bruce Burris’s nationally recognized artwork for the cover and pages of this issue.

So please enjoy your reading of disClosure no. 9: manholes.
Editor's preface

Acknowledgments

There are so many people who have helped make this issue of * disclosed* possible. On behalf of the collective for issue 9, I would like to thank those people whose time, energy and assistance have been invaluable. Our advisors, Peter Mortensen, Wolfgang Natter, Dana Nelson and Ted Schatzki, have guided us with a gentle and supportive lead. The timely financial support of the UK Student Government Association and the Committee on Social Theory, as well as the production assistance of Sandra Anders and Eric Crowden at UK Publishing Services, has eased the birthing of the final product before you. Members of the Committee on Social Theory who serve as reviewers of our articles sacrifice several hours of time and talent to help us complete the review process. For their expert contributions in this regard, we thank Paola Bachetta, Susan Bordo, John Paul Jones, III, and Dana Nelson. Laura Sutton and John Paul Jones, III were wonderful interlocutors as we set up our interviews with bell hooks and Peter Jackson. And for their contributions and permission to produce their images, we would like to thank Bruce Burris, Michael Crawford, Andrew Feight, Steve Giovenco, Joe Lertola, Amanda Lewis, Pamela Mullins, Danny Shanahan, and Michael Veliqiette. The Departments of Geography and Philosophy as well as the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky have provided ongoing institutional support in the form of computer and technology resources and office space which are highly valued and appreciated.

I personally want to thank several people without whose help I could never have completed production of this issue. Carl Dahlman was my guide and tutor throughout the editorial and production process. Chris Ciochetti, Susan Mains, and Mike Dorn were also valuable resources as I defined my own editorship as well as great supporters during my editorial tenure. Richard Gilbreath, Jim Hanlon, and Matt McCourt have taught me (or perhaps saved me) and, most importantly, kept me from panicking when graphics and technology seemed to get the better of me. The savvy aesthetic eye of Susan Mains has provided inspiration and reassurance as I made layout decisions in the wee hours of production nights. But this journal is nothing if not a result the careful editorial decisions and work of Marianne Brennan, Mary Curran, Paul Kingsbury, Sarah Moore, Peggy Redd, Melinda Spence, and Theresa Zawacki. I find myself especially indebted to Mary who was, in all the finer details of editing, my right hand over the last year.

Contesting Masculinity

Works Cited
