Viveros (2003) Contemporary Latin American Perspectives on Masculinity

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In this article, Viveros acknowledges masculinity as a new topic of research in Latin America and attempts to explore the perspectives that have arisen from this research. She does this by compiling summaries of a variety of recent articles on the subject. Viveros organizes her review “around several themes that have been important in Latin America in this period: the construction of male identity, fatherhood, practices and representations, homosociality, and men’s reproductive health and sexuality” (2003: 29).

Viveros notes that the interest in men as gendered and worth studying came about at the same time as the creation of men’s groups. These groups were concerned that stereotypical male behavior was hurting not just women, but men themselves. She also notes that this period was characterized by women beginning increasingly to work outside the home, which caused social and economic changes for men.

In regards to the construction of male identity, the authors whom Viveros cites agree that men are generally seeking a new masculine identity, one that excludes sexism and machismo and allows men to live outside traditional cultural expectations based on power relations and shows of power. In practice, there is no established masculine identity in Latin America. Instead, men have multifaceted identities. Viveros notes significantly that “Masculinity is not an essential or static quality but a historical manifestation, a social construction and cultural creation” (2003: 37).

Fatherhood is a significant part of male life across Latin America. Becoming a father conveys a man’s virility and gives him an opportunity to demonstrate responsibility to both his family and his community. Fatherhood may also cause internal conflict in a man, reminding young men of the stereotypical Latin American father, who is absent.

Viveros includes summaries of articles on homosociality, which is an important aspect of Latin American male culture because public, social realms are traditionally masculine. She refers to articles that discuss how martial arts, tango songs, and football chants have bearings on male experience and identity.

Reproductive health used to be an area dominated by women’s health issues, but men are increasingly encouraged to become involved in reproductive decisions. Regarding health in general, Viveros cites De Keijzer (1995) who “explains how hegemonic masculinity has a notably harmful impact on men’s health” (Viveros 2003: 47), most notably because of violence in interpersonal relationships.

Viveros closes by suggesting that more research should be done specifically to gain a better understanding of masculinity, the relationship between men and power, and the influence of women taking jobs. She also stresses that the role of women in male lives and the existence of gender inequality cannot be ignored.