

Roy on Masculinity

“[M]asculinity and manhood have had many meanings, some in opposition to others. At some times and places, masculinity has been associated with physical strength, at others with restraint and civility. Manhood has been associated with homosocial—men only—gangs and friendship groups or, alternatively, with strong family ties. ‘Real men’ have been those whose independence chafes at all conformity to authority or, alternatively, those who respectfully accept their station in life. This historical variation further attests to the socially constructed (rather than naturally given) character of masculinity.”

A key development in constructing manhood was the creation of nation-states, which resulted in the legal control of marriage and the connection between masculinity and military prowess.

Development of manhood in America

Useful man (early America): Manhood meant serving the community. Humility was a virtue.

Self-made man (19th century): Manhood meant cultivating individual talent and upward social mobility. This definition was connected to the public sphere and to bodily restraint (sobriety, propriety, etc.).

The crisis of masculinity (20th century): The rise of the office job challenged the image of the self-made man. Organized sports and Scouting were two responses to this crisis. Manhood began to be contrasted to femininity instead of boyhood. The “real” man was also contrasted with the “homosexual,” a new construction. Homosocial behavior and affection became problematic.