What It Means to Be a Man

Reflections on Puerto Rican Masculinity

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Rutgers University Press
New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London
part of all of our relationships, and I consider men to be participants in cycles of authority and rebellion:

What I have written is not the result of field research, a survey, or an empirical study. Nor is it autobiographical. The book is a contemplation that arises out of observations and experiences, and out of introspection into my Puerto Rican male subjectivity. It is an interpretation in search of the meanings of masculinity within the approaches of interpretative anthropology and anthropology as cultural criticism (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). From an interpretative perspective, I use Geertz's metaphor (1973) that culture is like a text in which social actions can be read in terms of their meanings. Likewise, I support the recognition that social life is fundamentally a negotiation of meanings (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 26).

We men, especially those who are Latin American, are commonly described as machistas, and our behaviors are cataloged under the category known as "machismo." To a large extent, we are categorized as beings who are aggressive, oppressive, narcissistic, insecure, loud-mouthed, womanizers, massive drinkers, persons who have an uncontrollable sexual prowess, and who are, as Jorge Negrete would sing, parránderos de parranda larga (don't-stop-'til-you-drop partiers).¹

"Machismo," a term that presumes to be a concept, was popularized in the social literature of the fifties and sixties and was initially presented as a Latin American phenomenon that appeared in its crudest form in the peasant and working classes.² The ethnocentric and class natures of the first approaches to the literature on machismo—ethnocentric because of its emphasis on what is Latin American and classist because machismo behavior is situated almost exclusively in certain social classes—were modified when machismo was incorporated into feminist discourse and into the daily speech of men and women in Latin America and the United States (Stone 1974). Although many authors [Abad, Ramos, and Boyce 1974; Padilla and Ruiz 1973] pointed out some purportedly positive aspects of machismo,
such as courage, responsibility, and perseverance, the fact remains that the term is associated with male traits or behaviors to which negative qualities are attributed: "the sum total of simultaneous brutality, arrogance, and submissiveness" [De Jesús Guerrero 1977, 37]. In addition, the term has been incorporated into the repertoire of insults along with "barbarian, savage, gorilla, lout, and cafre (Kaffir)."

Examining the literature on machismo, we find the term used in multiple ways: sometimes as a set of attitudes, other times as a configuration of traits, and still other times as a syndrome. These are the frames of reference that specify the individual characteristics. In the abundant literature, there is a great deal of repetition in the definitions and descriptions. It can be said that most of the documents on machismo are variations of the initial approaches by Bermúdez (1955) and Stycos (1955). Bermúdez defines machismo as a typical case of unconscious compensation against feminist tendencies hidden in the Mexican man. From Bermúdez on, a current of thinking develops that perceives machismo as an intrapsychic phenomenon dissociated from its sociohistorical roots. This current continued to examine machismo from the perspective of psychology, describing it in a language categorized by clinical interpretations and opinions and paying inadequate attention to historical processes, social structures, and cultural categories.

In a study whose principal aim is exploring the social dynamics of demographic growth and the forms in which culture "in part determines the circumstances under which, and the extent to which, coitus occurs" (8), Stycos explains machismo as an analytical category. In other words, Stycos is studying sociocultural aspects of human fertility in order to make specific recommendations to guide the Puerto Rican birth control programs of the fifties, and among the obstacles to lowering the birthrate, Stycos stresses machismo. What does he understand "machismo" to mean?

The drive in males to manifest their virility we have termed machismo. The complex would not seem to have the importance, ascribed to it before the field investigation, of driving men to produce a limitless quantity of children. However, it may have other direct and indirect effects on fertility: (1) the anxiety to disprove sterility encourages a rapid first birth; (2) the anxiety over production of male offspring, to prove that one can "make males," may encourage higher fertility where female offspring occur earlier in birth order; (3) serial marriage and extramarital activity may be partly products of a need to demonstrate sexuality; (4) certain negative attitudes toward birth control seem related to this complex. For example, resistance to the condom in the way of preference for the "clean spur" (espuela limpia) might be interpreted as a product of a virility-manifesting drive. (246)

For Stycos, "machismo" means virility, and as evidence he offers the responses of 72 men to the following questions: "Speaking of being a macho completo (complete man), how does a man show it? How does he prove it?" Of those interviewed, 15.4 percent answered that machismo is manifested "through abusiveness." The percentage of answers associated with what some have called the positive aspects of machismo (courage, honesty, chivalry, reliability, being a good neighbor, and being man of honor) was 73.7 percent, while those associated with virility and sexuality came to 39.2 percent. Despite the fact that the results of the survey do not prove that the set of attitudes he calls "machismo"
is responsible for a man's wanting to have many children, Stycos emphasizes those answers associated with sexuality in order to conclude that machismo is a "general lower-class value" (42) and is transmitted by penis adulation of infants and by the reinforcement of activities considered to be masculine. Describing the socialization process that turns the machito en macho (little male into a male), he notes:

The most striking manifestation of attempts to inculcate machismo occurs in the adult adulation of the infantile penis. By praising and calling a great deal of attention to the penis, the parent can communicate to the child the literal or symbolic value of the male organ. (42)

Stycos arrives at this conclusion, and he acknowledges this, by quoting out of context from ethnographic reports. By concentrating on the study of lower classes, he does not realize that penis adulation is a generalized phenomenon in Puerto Rico and is seen in all social classes. On the other hand, because he lacks a historical and comparative perspective, Stycos does not recognize that such behavior forms part of phallocentrism or the penis cult that characterizes many societies in which the masculine ideology is dominant. Therefore, it is not specific or exclusive to a few Puerto Ricans. 5

In later research, Hill, Stycos, and Back (1959) focused on what is known as the "machismo complex," which was subjected to verification in a new survey administered to 322 Puerto Rican men. Analysis of the results showed that in the men surveyed, there existed no unconscious anxieties that might lead them to prove their virility. Hill, Stycos, and Back are emphatic in their position with respect to machismo:

The alleged masculinity drives, which are supposed to lie behind the Puerto Rican male's opposition to family limitation, appear largely the figment of [the imagination of] novelists and others who have stereotyped all Puerto Rican men with the macho stamp. In Puerto Rico men are authoritarian, dominant, and distant, but not virility obsessed. (375)

This finding seems to have no impact on the subsequent definitions of machismo. Almost two decades later, Stevens and other researchers point out that machismo is an orientation, which she describes as the "cult of virility." 6

The chief characteristics of this cult are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships. (Stevens 1976, 90)

In the range of definitions of machismo, many variations and subtleties are incorporated according to the conceptualizations or purposes of those who write about the subject. As a general rule, the literature on machismo is essentially descriptive, uncritical, and repetitive. The term is invariably defined as a set of attitudes, behaviors, and practices that characterize men. Some authors pay more attention to individual psychological characteristics and point out the traits of immaturity, narcissism, having an inferiority complex, aggressiveness, promiscuity, irresponsibility, latent homosexuality, ambivalence toward and conflictive relationships with women, and sexual anxiety. There is, therefore, a tendency to focus on machismo on the individual level, emphasizing machismo's pathological and
destructive aspects; that is to say, a position framed within a clinical discourse.

Others approach the study of machismo from what can be called a sociocultural perspective, because it focuses more on social, economical, and historical factors that intervene in the development of machismo, especially in Latin America. This literature mainly discusses aspects such as the system of male superiority, subordination of women, and power conflicts among men. Although the negative or destructive aspects of machismo are recognized, attention is also paid to the positive aspects, among which the authors mention courage, strength, responsibility, perseverance, and protecting the family. De la Canela [1981] calls this literature “culturalist.”

To illustrate how repetitive and uncritical the writings on machismo can be, I will briefly examine two works published in Puerto Rico at the end of the seventies. Working from a very small bibliography and from his observations in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries, Mejía Ricart explains that

among the men of the region [machismo] tends to generate a social role that includes twenty principal characteristics. These fall into two groups of ten; those of the first group are related to male sexual behavior and the others are tied to the position adopted by the individual vis-à-vis society. (1975, 354–358)

The first group includes the following:

1. Sexual potency: proving to himself and others his great sexual potency
2. Don Juanismo: tending to possess an unlimited num-

ber of women, virgins if possible, and to support several women simultaneously
3. Parranderismo: irrepressibly wanting to go out with male friends to drink alcohol and meet prostitutes or “occasional girlfriends”
4. Masculine exhibitionism: partially or totally exhibiting those parts of the body that characterize the male sex (the penis, chest hair, muscles, etc.), whether emphasizing gestures, tone of voice, manner of walking, or other behaviors that are customary in men
5. Coprolalia: consciously using dirty language and making obscene jokes
6. Cult of virginity: demanding virginity in the woman as a test of her innocence, combined with defending his sisters’ or close female relatives’ virginity; it is also a source of pride to deflower all those women whom he is able to convince or force
7. Sexual repression of woman: relegating the woman to a merely passive role in the search for her mate; likewise for sexual intercourse
8. Taboo on sexual subjects: both men and women abstaining from commenting to each other about their sexual experiences and desires, with the exception of men with prostitutes and partying girlfriends
9. Fertility: identifying masculinity with the procreation of many children
10. Procreation of male offspring: procreating a large number of males rather than females is a sign of machismo for the man

In the second list there appear:

1. Stereotyping of male superiority: men being superior over women in both physical and intellectual features
2. Emotional rigidity: showing aloofness from loved ones and apparent rigidity in critical situations
3. Generational distancing: psychological distancing between the man and younger generations
4. Independence: desiring independence for the man of the machista culture; this desire is encouraged by parents beginning in childhood, while any hint of autonomous conduct in women is hindered
5. Aggressiveness: being physically or psychologically violent is considered the “successful” way of settling differences with others and is one of the most characteristic traits of machismo
6. Power hunger: wanting to achieve and exercise social control in all its various manifestations
7. Physical strength: having strength is an attribute inherent to masculinity
8. Personal courage: including the ability to face danger, even when unnecessary; many carry this to the point of recklessness, but it is without a doubt the touchstone of the constellation of macho traits
9. Honor: identifying honor, which in this context is a mixture of self-esteem, with the behavior of wife and daughters, rather than with his own; condescending treatment of the weak, and courteous treatment of any woman who is not his wife
10. Extravagance: spending much money before strangers—even at the cost of causing daily financial problems in personal life—with the objective of giving a good impression and showing off financial power

The twenty traits represent virtually all the characteristics of machismo that appeared in the literature on the subject at the time that Mejía Ricart’s article was published.

No distinction is made between the so-called negative, pathological, or destructive traits and those considered positive. Mejía Ricart gives the impression that all of the traits are reprehensible and none deserve to be preserved. He recognizes that machismo is manifested in an unequal manner in the class structure, with a lesser incidence in the higher classes because women have more economic independence from their husbands, higher prestige, and more power. For him, the middle classes display the greatest manifestations of machismo. Although machismo also exists in the lower classes, variations appear there because women have more sexual freedom than their counterparts in the other social classes. The explanation of the origins of machismo given by Mejía Ricart is very unsatisfactory. The explanation rests upon such factors as the patriarchy inherited by Latin American societies in Western culture, regional economic conditions, wars of independence, and internal struggles. Mejía Ricart concludes the article with a call to conquer machismo.

Uncritically accepting the description of traits that appear in the literature and not submitting them to analysis leads Mejía Ricart to present us with a stereotyped vision of a Latin American man that, nevertheless, appears as a great truth. The major problem with his study is that it does not go beyond an enumeration of the so-called traits. The study also does not distinguish between ideology and behavior. The traits, which in my opinion are actions, seem not to be connected to the social context in which they are expressed.

If we are to go beyond the conceptual limitations of the literature on machismo, then it is fundamental that a distinction be made between ideology and behavior. The masculine ideology, because it is a social construction that favors the masculine and belittles the feminine, places us men in
a universe of categories and symbols of power that we reproduce daily. This ideology forms and guides us in our behavior as men. In class societies, these behaviors are manifested unequally and at the same time are articulated in the position that each person occupies in the social hierarchy. For that reason, although there is one ideology, there are various behaviors; they vary according to the power and privileges that each man possesses. The least powerful men and those in the greatest apparent competition with others to demonstrate their manhood resort to acts of behavior that exaggerate attributes of masculinity. The “machismo traits” that appear in Mejía Ricart’s article are acts of behavior that manifest class positions and are survival mechanisms used by the least powerful men in class societies.

To illustrate this last point, let us analyze one of the traits that Mejía Ricart lists: coprolalia. The use of dirty language and obscene jokes is a part of daily life for men and women and is, in addition, completely influenced by class origin. In some specific social encounters, this language is used; in others, its use is prohibited. Although coprolalia is more common among men, not all men use it. Additionally, this language needs to be seen within the social context in which it appears; for example, in peace-filled or conflict-filled situations. This sort of language tends to be more common in situations of conflict, but a man does not need to resort to this language to assert his masculinity. This kind of analysis could be done with each of the traits.

Basically, Mejía Ricart’s article repeats the clinical approach by presenting machismo as a quasi sickness and as a compensatory mechanism. In not attempting to transcend the limitations inherent in the term itself, Mejía Ricart cannot explain the complexity of the construction of masculinity and of masculine ideologies. As I have pointed out earlier [Ramírez 1989], representations of machismo, both popular and academic, describe us men as beings who are very homogeneous in our behavior. Nevertheless, our histories, literature, and ethnologies—without denying the powerful presence of colonels and patriarchs—indicate that we resemble Taso more than charro.7

The uncritical acceptance of machismo also appears in one of the studies in the area of gender and education that was most influential in Puerto Rico during the eighties [Picó 1979]. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of machismo present in elementary education by analyzing the subjects taught and the graphic content of school texts in Spanish and social studies. The definition of machismo given by Isabel Picó reproduces the traditional approach to the term in the literature:

We take “machismo” to be the set of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that results from belief in the superiority of one sex over the other. Within this vision of the world, the superior sex is the male. This superiority is due to various aspects: physical, intellectual, characterological, cultural, and sexual. Machismo is expressed essentially through habits, traditions, and attitudes that are discriminatory toward the female sex. It is a cultural phenomenon originating in economic conditions that transcend in order to become cause and effect, and thus legitimates the inequalities that exist in society. (v)

The researchers designed a questionnaire to identify the stereotyping of sex roles in textbooks through an analysis of the illustrations and content of the texts. Included among the questions were the number of people, their professions, and positions as well as children’s games and activities. The
analysis found stereotyping even in the stories in which animals appeared. In the stories, there was a higher representation of males than females, and every animal was assigned characteristics traditionally considered to be proper to each sex. The women were presented in numerically smaller proportion than the men and subordinate to them. With respect to the manifestation of emotions in the social sciences texts, feelings and tenderness were expressed by the female figures. In general, the vision of the woman that appeared in the texts was that of a consumer, in charge of buying basic provisions, while the men worked and were the breadwinners; that is, there was a vision of the woman as dependent upon her man to satisfy her basic needs. The article points out the omission of women in the teaching of history. Texts glorify the male figure, and the role of females was either not mentioned or minimized. When a female appeared, it was primarily in the role as wife or mother. Picó concludes: "The social studies texts are characterized by an approach to the history of peoples which ignores women's presence and reduces their importance in virtually all the historical and cultural periods of the peoples studied" [60].

In addition to the analyses of texts, 128 female elementary school teachers were surveyed in the San Juan school district, and teacher-student interaction in the classrooms was observed in order to gauge the degree of stereotyping of sex roles. In analyzing the survey, it was found that teachers were aware of the sex roles assigned to each gender in Puerto Rican society. Most of the teachers favored greater female participation in positions of power and in decision making, as well as the sharing of domestic work and child raising with men. They were more conservative with respect to supporting the traditional concepts of sexuality, especially the importance of preserving a woman's virginity. The observations of teacher-student interaction found differential treatment on the basis of gender in both the number of times that boys and girls were called upon and the reasons for doing so.

The importance of this research is undeniable for demonstrating how male domination is perpetuated in Puerto Rican society by presenting women as subordinate, dependent beings in contrast to the more or less powerful male image. Picó, however, like those who uncritically use the category of "machismo," cannot escape the limitations inherent to the category. The study has three important limitations. First, Picó does not elaborate on the assertion that machismo is a cultural phenomenon. Second, she does not discuss the economic conditions that, according to her, give rise to machismo. Finally, she asserts that machismo is equivalent to sexism.

I disagree with the last assertion for many reasons. Sexism is an ideology that is of great specificity and lacks the contradictions and ambiguities of the term "machismo." Sexism is based on biological differences between men and women and, in turn, maintains that these differences are expressed by or are translated into cultural characteristics or behaviors. Sexism argues a specificity about each sex, an inherent inequality that attributes to one sex superiority over the other. In other words, sexist ideology posits subordination, with the corresponding sexual hierarchy and social asymmetry directed toward undervaluing femaleness. However, the sexist ideology is also applied to sexual orientations that break from total heterosexuality, as in the case of homosexuality and lesbianism. Therefore, it is a sexist position to maintain that specific human populations have greater or less sexual potency or pleasure because of sexuality.
Examples are references to "black men's immense sexual cravings" and the perpetuation of the Latin lover myth, as if all Latin American men were the incarnation of Perifirio Rubirosa.

In contrast to the approaches of the studies summarized above, there is an exception to the literature, a study of machismo with a different orientation, refer to the doctoral dissertation of Víctor De la Cancela (1981), who makes a distinction between the traditional and culturalist orientations in the literature on machismo. De la Cancela labels as "traditional" those approaches that are inscribed within the clinical discourse and stress machismo as a personality characteristic, and he calls "culturalist" those that take into account sociohistorical factors. This distinction allows him to distance himself from the usual approaches that appear in the literature of machismo and to design his research from a dialectical perspective, which aims to "discover the interactive, interconnected, and contradictory aspects of machismo given a specific socio-historical context." The dialectical perspective that De la Cancela uses is based on a criticism leveled at the dominant Anglo-American culture in the United States. In this culture, Latin cultural manifestations are not generally accepted, and some are considered an aberration. In opposition to this tendency, especially in psychology, De la Cancela emphasizes the importance of understanding the culture from a relativist perspective, as the result of a prevailing social order that is due to historical changes. Specifically, De la Cancela sees the Latin culture in the United States as an adaptation that is due to that population's subordination. Applying this perspective to his analysis of machismo reveals both the marginal position of Latins in the economic and social structures and the consequences of that marginalization. De la Cancela believes that his dialectical approach explains machismo as a phenomenon that is the product of a multiplicity of causes, among which socioeconomical factors prevail.

In an exhaustive empirical study, De la Cancela interviewed twenty Puerto Rican males and twenty Puerto Rican females with identical demographic characteristics of age, place of residence, education, and income. The people interviewed were between 18 and 21, had high school educations or lower, had annual incomes less than $8,000, and lived in the northeastern United States. To gather the data, a questionnaire containing 245 items was used. The questionnaire combined the Likert scale, true-false statements, and open questions; it was divided into five sections: demographic information on the subjects, masculine identity, parenting, male-female relationships, and alienation understood as the subjects' perception of the degree of control they had in their lives and their interaction with U.S. society. Through statistical analysis of the answers, De la Cancela arrived at four conclusions. The first was that being a man included both positive and negative aspects. In their answers, the women tended to stress negative traits and to associate machismo with sexual issues, while the men emphasized positive aspects and associated the term with responsibilities. The second conclusion had to do with the way in which machismo influences the concept of Puerto Rican paternity. "Being a man" implies that the man is an important figure in the family and is available to help raise his children. His function is not merely disciplinary, it is understood that the father-child relationship should be one of confidence, respect, acceptance, and friendship. The third conclusion is somewhat mixed, stating that Puerto Rican men believe that there are differences between their values and those of the Anglos, in the sense that the Anglos are
considered more liberal with and faithful to their women and less interested in having large families. Puerto Ricans also felt that they have less control over their own lives because they have lower incomes and less education. In addition, because of the precariousness of their situation, machismo expresses the ability to be a good worker and the family breadwinner. Finally, De la Cancela concludes that there is a difference between the concept of machismo held by Puerto Ricans and that which prevails in the dominant schools of the social sciences. The Puerto Rican men interviewed did not undervalue women; their relationships with male peers were not particularly charged with tension, and they did not establish a correlation between machismo, war, and revolutions.

In my opinion, despite its efforts and attempts to offer a dialectical interpretation of machismo that integrates contradictory elements or strengths and explains cultural, socioeconomical, and historical factors, this research does not transcend the limitation inherent in the term "machismo."

Despite its limited power of explanation, the use of the term "machismo" to describe male behavior continues in Puerto Rico. In a relatively recent publication on the history of the Barrio Caimito in Río Piedras, Fernando Picó (1989) speaks of how rooted "machista values" are in that community. To illustrate, he lists the following "values":

- the division of the male and female spaces in the house and on the street, the difference in the education given to boys and girls, the double standard in male and female sexual mores, the exaggerated admiration of male behavior, the mystification of maternity, the cult of weapons and other symbols of virility, taking away the salary that women earn...[136]

Trapped by the generalized use of the term, Picó does not notice that he is describing the Barrio Caimito version of gender differences that exist in many human societies.

In other research on gender in Puerto Rico, the concept of "sexism" is used (Azize Vargas 1992; Ostolaza Bey 1989). For example, Ostolaza Bey, in spite of her attempts to define sexism, still confuses one term with another when she says: "For ideological analysis, the term 'sexism' replaces the better known and coarser term 'machismo.'" (22).

In conclusion, the uncritical reproduction of the terminology of machismo and the use of "machismo" as an analytical category perpetuates an erroneous conceptualization of Latin American men. Although the ethnocentric and class approaches of early studies have been somewhat modified, the reductionist element remains unchanged. Basically, reductionism consists of presenting men as very homogeneous beings and not adequately taking into account the complexity of masculinity and the great variations in its manifestations. Much of the literature on machismo and the writings of some feminists erase the existence of some differences between men and women that, although culturally constructed, serve as a basis for social order and do not necessarily imply inequality. When pre-state communities, organized by kinship systems, established the spheres of gender and human reproduction, they did not necessarily have the intention of establishing a system of inequality. They were recognizing and affirming differences and designing some controls assigned to each person in the cultural system; this is what Illich (1982) calls the vernacular gender.9

Another great limitation of the literature on machismo
is placing too much emphasis on behaviors and not paying enough attention to the discourses. As we shall see later on, in our discourses, we Latin American men present, defend, and justify our hegemonic position; and in the study of the discourses, we find the elements that form our masculinity in all of its heterogeneity, contradictions, and anxieties.

Critical eye concerning machismo produces a deep, disturbing

Pointing out the conceptual limitations of studies on machismo and their limited explanatory power, in addition to my concern about the permanence of the category of machismo and the widespread use of the term “machismo” to describe and explain Puerto Rican men, should not be taken to be a justification of male domination and of men’s privileges. On the contrary, I maintain that the uncritical reproduction of that category is a pitfall with respect to understanding the construction of masculinity, the relationships between genders, and the possibility of changing the parameters of masculinity. In contrast
to the theoretical deficiencies of the literature on machismo, more recent studies on sexuality, masculine ideologies, and the construction of masculinity offer better explanations of how we become, or are made into, men. Theoretical approaches help to understand the complexity of the cultural construction of genders [MacCormack and Strathern 1980; Ortner and Whitehead 1981]; the uses of sexuality [Dover 1978; Herdt 1981; Keuls 1985]; relationships between genders [Reiter 1975; Sanday 1981]; and relationships between men [Brandes 1980; Herdt 1982; Herzfeld 1985].

Masculine ideologies are cognitive and discursive constructions that prevail in societies structured on the basis of asymmetrical relationships between genders. These constructions are articulated in shows of strength and games of power that display a multiplicity of manifestations—a product of the human species' cultural plurality. In complex societies, these constructions are expressed in differentiated and contradictory forms. Tackling the subject of ideology is no easy task; in this century, ideology is one of the major subjects of debate in the social sciences, especially among Marxist schools of thought. The discussion of these debates lies outside the scope and objectives of this book, although I think it necessary to point out that I use the concept of ideology in two senses: as a mode of perceiving and interpreting experiences and as a mode to influence actions. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of ideology is not limited to political direction and action but is considered an integral part of the social, economic, and supernatural spheres [Nash 1979]. I am not of the opinion that ideology is exclusively or primarily false awareness or false representation; rather, I take ideology to be both the system of beliefs characteristic of a class or group and the general process of the production of ideas and meanings (Williams 1977).

In the discussion of masculinity that follows, I shall use the plural to avoid falling into reductionism. Although there are many common elements, I do not agree with the view that there exists a uniform and static masculinity, which is shared equally by all men across time and space. To understand that which we call "masculinity," we should approach this study from the perspective of the human species' cultural diversity. Sex is a biological differentiation of the species associated with reproduction, while gender is a construction of the species in a cultural medium. Given the abundant ethnographic evidence of this cultural diversity, it is clear that we will find not a single ideology but rather masculine ideologies, plural, which are the product of, and simultaneously due to, diversity. Since cultures are not static but rather undergo constant change, within society masculinity is subject to modifications through time. As Brittan states:

In talking about the masculine ideology, we are therefore not only referring to the economic and political position of men, but also how they define and theorize sexuality and gender. And it is the variability of these theories and definitions that, to a large extent, constitute the historical specificity of this or that form of masculinity. (1989, 18)

Every society differentiates between genders, specifies the spheres of masculinity and femininity, and assigns to each gender-specific attributes, characteristics, and expectations. People are recognized and evaluated on the basis of the way they fulfill the demands assigned to them. Culture offers cues and instructions so that people may make their own gender identity, in order to evaluate and esteem themselves as the incarnation and representation of their gender.
Therefore, masculinity and femininity are not a reality separate from the individual; they are a cultural construction whose basis is not biological—even though the cultural construction is based on biological differences—but constructed, designed, agreed to, and upheld by a system of beliefs, attributes, and expectations. With respect to this point, Whitehead says:

When I speak of cultural constructions of gender, I simply mean the ideas that give social meaning to physical differences between the sexes, rendering two biological classes, male and female, into two social classes, men and women, and making the social relationships in which men and women stand toward each other appear reasonable and appropriate. (1981, 83)

The constructionist approach maintains that the categories through which we perceive, evaluate, and think are socially constructed. They do not exist independently of the individual; they do not constitute a reality that we approach in order to know objectively. The categories are social constructions with cultural specificity. This point of view emphasizes the active dimension of individuals who, employing the guidelines that their culture lays down, construct their reality in accordance with or in opposition to these guidelines. In anthropology this process is generally referred to as "cultural construction," while other disciplines call it "social construction" (Stein, 1992). The artificiality of cultural institutions, taken as being juxtaposed against nature, as well as their construction, variability, and relativity, is an old topic in anthropology, found even as early as the pioneering and controversial works of Benedict (1946) and Mead (1950). The current constructionism is characterized by the systematic identification of the "cultural and social pro-

cesses to which culturally variable sex and gender notions might be related." (Ortner and Whitehead 1981, 1). As Jorge-Rivero points out in his use of gender and sexuality studies, the constructionist approach states that gender behavior—and all sexual manifestation—is influenced by the set of historical-social norms, ideas, symbols, and meanings which are in turn constituted in, for and by the individual. (1989, 4)

The influence of the constructionist approach in gender and sexual orientation studies, and the beginning of the modern debate on this approach, can be traced to the influence of the work of McIntosh (1992) and Foucault (1990a).

McIntosh begins her analysis by first positing that homosexuality is usually conceived as a condition characterizing certain individuals and that many people assume that there are two types of people: homosexuals and heterosexuals. She points out that Bieber (1965) and other authors present a third type, the bisexual, when they discover that it is not possible to dichotomize sexual orientation because there are people who have relations with both sexes. McIntosh criticizes this position, and, using the sociological concept of stigmatization, she suggests that from a medical or psychiatric perspective, the idea of homosexuality as a condition operates as a mechanism of social control. To say that homosexuality is a social problem is to condemn some people and stigmatize them as deviants. On the contrary, McIntosh proposes that the homosexual be seen as acting out a role, which is defined in terms of expectations. Using historical and ethnographic evidence, she stresses that such a role exists in some societies but not in others, in which sexual intercourse with the same sex is accepted as an integral part of the variety of sexual patterns. In other words,
evidence shows that preference for the same sex can occur without creating the category of "homosexual," which allegedly was invented by Dr. Karoly Maria Benkert in Germany in 1869 (Posner 1992, 125; Pronger 1990, 87). In those societies that do not have the category of "homosexual," sexual expression with the same sex is not considered separately from sexuality in general, and those who practice it are not "labeled." This practice was the case during Athens's classical period, when adult citizens and married men had sexual and amorous relationships with youths in a complex, institutionalized, and highly ritualized form of homoeroticism. By using the ancient Athenians as an example, I am not trying to give the impression that homoeroticism is an archaic or bizarre practice. Homoeroticism is both an ancient and modern practice. In several societies, among them ours, homoeroticism is most visible in situations in which men do not have access to women, such as in our prison system. Some authors, such as Richard Posner (1992), label as "opportunistic homosexuality" same-sex relations that are not "mediatized" by the category "homosexual." As this topic is discussed at length in another part of this book, it should suffice to refer to a sexual identity study in Costa Rica in which the authors have recognized men who have sex with other men without being incarcerated or isolated from women yet who identify themselves as lovers of women and do not consider themselves homosexuals.

It is they whom we have in mind when we say that a lance [sic] may be a male, that a querida may be a querido. If one were to ask them to what extent they love men, they might have to pause to consider their reply (assuming they were willing to search themselves for an honest answer), because the question would not have occurred to them. Their relatively rare sex with men is not important enough to affect their self-identity. (Kütsche and Page 1992, 11)

Foucault (1990a) believes that sexualities are constantly made and modified and discusses the rise of the modern idea of sexuality in the West and the way sexuality is constructed in a specific social and historical context. He differentiates between carnal, sensory, and sexual experiences. Sexual experiences are taken to be the product of a system of knowledge and modes of power. According to Foucault, modern Western sexuality is characterized by an explosion of discourses of power and knowledge in which sexual meanings and doctrines are constantly generated in a culture obsessed with sexuality.

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century—bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will—did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so, it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. As if it suspected sex of harboring a fundamental secret. As if it needed this production of truth. As if it was essential that sex be inscribed not only in an economy of pleasure but in an ordered system of knowledge. (69)

Another important contribution in the development of the constructionist approach can be found in the anthology edited by Ortner and Whitehead (1981). In the introduction, the authors indicate that the articles in the collection are characterized by their approach to studies on gender, sexuality,
and reproduction; these phenomena are treated as symbols to which every society attributes specific meanings. Each symbol can be understood by placing it and studying it within the context of the entire symbology of each society. Therefore, the articulation between symbols and meanings becomes the object of study.

Masculine ideologies are cultural constructions that create asymmetrical relationships between genders. The asymmetry consists of making distinctions in such a way that the tasks and functions assigned to each person, as with other attributes such as prestige or power, are neither proportional nor comparable. The levels of asymmetry vary from one society to another, from the strictest separation and inequality between genders to systems in which women enjoy certain rights and have a relative "equality" with men, as happens in some modern democracies. Asymmetrical relationships are created on the basis of superiority of men and the subordination, devaluation, and inferiorizing of women. Simultaneously, the sphere of masculinity is valued, praised, and privileged: The origins of this system, built by and for men, in which women are the object of what Ostolaza Bey (1989) rightly calls "the sex-gender system with masculine dominance," have occupied a prominent place in the literature of anthropology since the early seventies, especially in the works of feminist anthropologists. The system is built upon the basis of inequality. The nature, origins, and evolution of that inequality are points of debate in modern anthropology and are linked both to changing ideas about woman's role in the evolution of societies and to recent interpretations of hunting and gathering societies.  

In societies having dominant masculine ideologies, we men are constantly constructing ourselves, and at times, as Neruda says, we become tired. What does it mean when we say that being men means constantly making ourselves? Why do we become tired? What goes into being a man? What does "masculinity" mean? How is masculinity constructed? To answer these questions, I will examine several anthropological studies that analyze the sphere of masculinity in many societies.

Gilmore (1990) approaches the study of the elements of masculinity—what it means to be a man—from an ethnographic and comparative perspective. For this purpose, he analyzes masculine ideologies in several societies selected by a cultural sampling. This technique allows him to obtain representation both of different types of social formations, from the simplest to the most complex, and of different geographic or cultural areas. The societies in the sample include rural communities in the Mediterranean; Truk Island in Micronesia; the Mehinaku Indians of the Xingú forest reserve in central Brazil; the Samburu of northern Kenya; the Sambia of the New Guinea highlands, China, India, Japan, and Tahiti; and the Semai of central Malaysia. Except for the Sambia of Tahiti and the Semai, he finds a common element, a dominant tendency in the construction of masculinity: to be a man is more than the mere fact of having been born male. The man has to demonstrate his manhood and have his manhood recognized. Gilmore says:

Amongst most of the peoples that anthropologists are familiar with, true manhood is a precious and elusive status beyond mere maleness; a hortatory image that men and boys aspire to and that their culture demands of them as a measure of belonging. . . . A restricted status, there are always men who fail the test. These are the negative examples, the effete men, the men-who-
are no-men, held up scornfully to inspire conformity to the glorious ideal. (17)

Gilmore’s main argument is that masculine ideologies make an indispensable contribution to the continuity of social systems and to the psychological integration of men into their community (3). In most of the societies Gilmore analyzed, masculinity was tied to the requirement that the man be a provider. Being a provider does not mean that the woman’s contribution to the sustenance and well-being of the domestic unit and to the community in general is denied; the emphasis lies on the recurrence of three notions of masculinity: first, the association of masculinity with emphasis on hard work and effective enterprise; second, the relationship between masculinity and bigness, defined not only in physical terms but also in achievements and possessions, and consequently the association of wealth with privilege and power; and third, masculinity as a sense of personal accomplishment achieved by positive or authoritative actions that contribute to, or are considered to contribute to, society in general (110). In an overwhelming number of the societies Gilmore studied, masculine ideologies are dominant. Men are assigned the most difficult and dangerous tasks, such as finding “animal protein, fending off predators, and fighting wars” (120). There is ample evidence that supports this conclusion. Gilmore attributes the assignment of the most dangerous tasks to men for two main reasons. The first is that men possess greater upper body strength; the second involves men’s contribution to the biological reproduction of the human species: we men are unnecessary after impregnating the woman. In contrast, gestation, birth, and lactation—female functions—are indispensable for the reproduction of the human baby. Gilmore bases his argument on the ideas of Friedl, who points out that for biological reasons, “a population can survive the loss of men more easily than that of women” (1975, 135). Because men are more dispensable, they are assigned tasks of greater risk than those assigned to women, and to confront these risks it is necessary to have a socialization process that trains men to face dangers and not run from them.

I do not wish to suggest that women have it easier than men, but that their performances are judged by different standards and that these inspire different gender ideals. The main difference seems to be that men are expected to seek out and confront danger as a means of showing valor, while women are more expected to avoid such situations. (Gilmore 1990, 122)

Unlike societies in which masculine ideologies dominate, Gilmore presents the cases of Tahiti and the Semai, which lack masculine ideologies. ““The Tahitians and the Semai simply do not seem to care much about manhood” [217]. Why? How can that be explained? Admitting that there is insufficient information on these societies to arrive at definite conclusions, Gilmore attributes the absence of a masculine ideology to the fact that in these two societies there are abundant natural resources for survival. They do not hunt, and the economy is cooperative. Therefore, it is unnecessary to assign high-risk tasks to men. Another matter to be considered in any discussion of the construction of masculinity is sexuality—a fundamental part of masculine ideologies—in its articulation between power and pleasure. However, expressions of sexuality, including its biosocial dimension, vary greatly in human societies, thus making it difficult to generalize. Understanding the nexus between sexuality, power, and masculinity
requires us to refer to specific material, to the study of specific societies. Godelier’s study [1986] on the Baruya people of New Guinea is an example of the kind of research that allows us to understand these relationships. This study illustrates the connection between sexuality and competition in the construction of masculinity within a classless society. Turning to the study of other societies to understand aspects of our humanity is part of an anthropological tradition based upon the principle that anthropology, as Kluckhohn has said [1957], is a mirror of sorts for human beings because a knowledge of other societies helps us understand ourselves. Godelier analyzes the role of sexuality in the thinking of the men of the Baruya society and shows that each aspect of male domination can be explained on the basis of sexuality. The analysis is focused on three topics: the machinery of male domination, the production of great men, and the ideological justification of this social order [xii].

The Baruya people are found in the Eastern Highlands province of New Guinea. This area was the last to come under Australian colonial administration; the people’s first contact with white men was in 1951. Between 1967 and 1979, Godelier studied the Baruya during many periods of fieldwork. In 1979, the society numbered 2,179 individuals scattered in 17 villages located between two valleys at an elevation that varied from 1,610 to 2,300 meters above sea level [1]. The social organization consisted of an acephalous tribe of 15 clans divided into lineages, which are also segmented. The kinship system was patrilineal, so that at birth each baby was assigned to the father’s lineage or clan. Residence was patrilocal; boys lived near their parents. The marriage system distinguished five kinds of possible unions, but the first of them, called ginamare, was considered the norm. This first type of marriage was a system of direct exchange of women between two lineages or segments of a lineage. Of the five types of matrimonial unions, two were infrequent: One of them was when a young boy, who did not have a sister or female cousin to exchange, would approach a couple with a marriageable daughter and by working for them would persuade them to accept him as a son-in-law. The other case was done only with outside members of other tribes, to establish exchange relations using the system of paying for a wife with goods or property. The remaining three systems were based on variations of the system of ginamare and eventually reestablished the system of sister exchange. According to Godelier, the system’s logic is based on the principle that the only way “one can really compensate the gift of a woman is by giving another woman in exchange” [23] and the fact that the Baruya established that the lineages that offered women were superior to those that received the women. To reestablish the balance of power between lineages, it was necessary to have an exchange mechanism that allowed those that received women to become the offerers.

The economic system of the Baruya was based on horticulture using the slash-and-burn technique. Crops consisted primarily of sweet potato and a by-product of taro for ceremonial uses. Tuber crops were supplemented with pigs bred for food and the production of salt, an important article for exchange. Hunting and gathering had little importance.

The Baruya established a strict division of labor, with specific tasks assigned to each gender. In a system in which men were the owners of the land for planting and hunting and, of course, land rights were transferred to men exclusively. Women were excluded from land possession and from making and owning tools: Men lent women tools so that
they could do their assigned tasks. Women were also excluded from owning weapons, since hunting and war were tasks reserved for men [12]. Making a gender comparison, Godelier finds that the tasks assigned to women have the following characteristics:

a. require less physical strength, or to be more précise, do not entail a great deal of physical effort in a short space of time (as does felling a tree);
b. involve fewer risks of accident (many men are killed climbing the trees to pollard them, gather their fruit, or winkle out opossums, the principal game);
c. require less mutual help or cooperation among individuals—the women work alone much more than the men, carrying out generally more monotonous routine tasks (gathering sweet potatoes, feeding the pigs, cooking, gathering deadwood) [14].

We find again what Gilmore pointed out: tasks that require more physical strength and are of greater risk are assigned to men. But, according to Godelier, male domination does not stem from the social division of labor. On the contrary, Godelier stresses that the social division of labor among the Baruya presupposes male domination [14]. What makes up this system of domination? How is male superiority over women established, and how is it articulated with sexuality?

The system of male domination is based on six principles for excluding women: (a) women cannot own land but can use it; (b) women cannot own or use the more efficient tools that men use to clean the forest; (c) women cannot own or use weapons; (d) women neither participate in salt production nor exchange goods with other tribes, it is up to the men to obtain the salt bars, which can be used to obtain other goods; (e) women cannot own sacred objects; (f) women occupy a subordinate position in the production of kinship relations because men exchange women through the ginamare matrimonial system [29]. As a result of the list above, women are subordinate to men in the material, political, and symbolic spheres.

The reproduction and legitimization of the system of male domination are illustrated in the process of turning a boy into a man. As in other societies that consider males superior, men are not born, they are made. The Baruya invest great time and effort in transforming their boys into men through initiation rituals. Godelier indicates that the process includes ten years of sexual segregation. When the time comes to begin the initiation process, boys are separated from their mothers and taken to the men’s house, a place where women are not permitted, and are completely isolated from any contact with women. The purpose of the various ceremonies celebrated during that period is to separate the boy from his mother, disconnect him from the world of women, turn him into a man, and prepare him to face women again when he marries. The process is a complete immersion into the world of men through which a boy’s masculinity is constructed. The initiation rituals, responsibilities, attributes, and distinctions of masculinity that are gradually revealed to the initiates form a body of privileged knowledge about and for men. It is a secret knowledge that is never shared with women. In contrast, the process of turning a female adolescent into a married women takes less than two weeks and is relatively simple, which makes Godelier question whether it can be considered a true initiation ritual.

Godelier explains the uses of sexuality to support male domination among the Baruya by analyzing how they con-
ceptualize the human reproduction process and the meaning of bodily secretions. For these men, the baby is made from semen. When the semen unites with the mother's vaginal fluids, the sex of the fetus will be determined by the secretion that turns out to be dominant. If the semen prevails, the baby will be a boy. Also, during pregnancy, coitus continues to feed the baby. The natural or biological father creates the body, and the supernatural father, the sun, makes the eyes, nose, mouth, fingers, and toes (51). Semen is life and strength, and for this reason, couples practice oral sex, through which women swallow semen when they need physical strength. The first sexual relation of newlyweds is of this type because semen is considered essential for the production of maternal milk. During the initiation process, young boys swallow semen for many years. This very secret practice is carried out in the men's house because the young boys need semen to "make them grow taller and stronger than women, superior to them, capable of dominating and managing them" (52). Not just any man can give semen to the initiates. Married men cannot do so, because it is considered aggression against young boys for a married man, who uses his penis with women, to place it in an initiate's mouth. Doing so would contaminate the boy, who is in the process of separation from the world of women. Therefore, young unmarried men who have been initiated are the ones who provide semen to the initiates, and they cannot refuse to perform this homoerotic act because it is a fundamental part in this society's construction of masculinity. The practice stops as soon as the man marries. The Baruya believe that the female genitals, their secretions, and, above all, menstrual blood are contaminants, and therefore married men cannot provide semen to initiates. Godelier summarizes their attitude:

The attitude of the men toward menstrual blood, whenever they talk or think about it, verges on hysteria, mingling disgust, repulsion, and, above all, fear. For them, menstrual blood is dirty, and they rank it with those other polluting, repugnant substances, urine and feces. Above all, though, it is a substance that weakens women whenever it flows from them, and it would destroy men's strength if ever it came into contact with their bodies. (58)

Clearly, all of the conceptualization about both the nature and power of bodily secretions and how menstrual blood threatens virility is associated with a series of practices in gender relationships, in rituals of evasion and purification, and in sexual practices in keeping with the belief system. Godelier maintains that although from the outside the belief system related to menstruation appears to be in negative opposition to the belief system related to semen, it actually is not. On the contrary, menstrual blood forms a double reality that also contains a positive element (63), for menstruation is a manifestation of woman's power—"power in the woman's belly" (64). Analyzing the myths in greater depth, Godelier finds that there were periods when women had powers, but they were periods of disorder. According to the myths, order is established when men have control of all the powers. By taking powers from women, a belief system is built to discredit and minimize the importance of women's power, which is expressed in the beliefs about and practices of sexuality. In conclusion, we may say that the Baruya use sexuality "to serve as sign and meaning for things that in fact bear no relation to it" (xiii).

The construction of masculinity among the Baruya, the constant process of making men, does not end when one
acquires the status of a married man. Among the men themselves, a system of inequality exists. Although the Baruya is not a class society, not all men are equal. Besides their relationships with women, two hierarchical systems that confer power and privilege exist among the men. The first is hereditary and consists of belonging to the lineages that possess sacred objects and magical and religious formulas used in the initiation rituals. This is a system of association. The other system allows individuals to show their abilities through hunting, war, and shamanism; it is a competitive system through which men can acquire more power. Sexuality, competition, and power are elements that constitute the masculine ideologies, not only among the Baruya but in all the societies through time and space in which we men have imposed our hegemony.

After analyzing the literature on machismo, discussing the construction of masculinity from an anthropological perspective, and showing the concept of social construction as it applies to gender, it is now time to address the main topic of this book: masculinity in Puerto Rico. There are many difficulties to be faced when undertaking this task: (a) the lack of studies on the subject; (b) the presence of previous studies done during the fifties and sixties, in which “masculinity” was treated as “machismo” or as one aspect of studies of domestic groups and the socialization of boys and girls in working-class populations, rural communities (Landy 1965; Wolf 1952), and poor families (Lewis 1966c); (c) the virtual nonexistence of studies of the upper classes; and (d) the profound changes that Puerto Rican society has undergone in the last forty years (Rivera Medina and Ramírez 1985). We are talking about a complex society of approximately six million inhabitants, a society of various basically urban classes, part of whose