Introduction

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We are delighted to introduce the second issue of volume 2. We are beginning to see a pattern in the various submissions that we receive for the journal. While the editors have backgrounds in Literary Studies, Sociology, and Anthropology, the journal has appealed to the traditional social sciences and has reached out and connected to other disciplines, such as Art, Film Studies, Historical Studies, and Literary Studies. The journal is therefore beginning to see the making sense of gender and sexuality, moving beyond the established and perhaps somewhat hegemonic disciplinary focus on sociology and psychology. It is also important to keep in mind that when we say “social sciences,” we are talking about not only a range of different disciplines, but also heterogeneous approaches within those disciplines. For example, a journal recently advised an author that they would only accept qualitative research papers if the minimal sample was 35. Although the logic and explanation for this number in terms of saturation of themes and rigor of analysis appeals to themes of validity and reliability (although why 35 and not 36 or 34 remains unexplained), the idea of research on gender and sexuality as being framed through the scientific method still endures. This is not to say that we need to abandon approaches that aspire to the scientific method. On the contrary, such approaches are important, often providing systematic mapping and documenting of gendered and sexual processes and practices. By being grounded in the possibilities that the existing epistemologies are able to deliver, they provide an internal logic of certainty and a feeling of confidence. However, the criteria of validity and reliability in themselves limit what can or cannot be captured. This is part of the reason why we welcome submissions from the Arts and Humanities, as much as we do submissions from all other disciplines: we argue that they are able to open up and explore gender and sexuality differently. We are hopeful that we can develop the journal further to facilitate a platform to

share a wide range of driven disciplinary perspectives and support a range of epistemologies.

It must be emphasized that epistemologies are not something that the academy can claim as their own: they are part of everyday lives and embedded in our common sense, religious beliefs, and socialization. Also, there is sometimes slippage in how epistemology is defined, with it sometimes being referred to as a discipline in itself, or as a part of philosophy or a framing of knowledge (Kang 2005). Importantly, epistemologies have enabled a wide range of studies of knowledge and the sources of that knowledge (Marra and Palmer 2008). In many ways, discussions about epistemology focus on what counts as knowledge and what does not; debates about post-human, post-qualitative epistemologies of the Global South continue to illustrate that epistemologies provide unsettling accounts. Alongside this, the dominance and ascribed epistemological primacy of science appears to be experiencing a series of challenges from within and outside the academy. As Stephan Lewandowsky, Ulrich Ecker, and John Cook (2017) note, “We are now facing a situation in which a large share of the populace is living in an epistemic space that has abandoned conventional criteria of evidence, internal consistency, and fact-seeking.” As Jean-François Lyotard (1984) noted, the end of the metanarrative not only fractured the authority of religion and science; there has also been a stabilization of self-doubt as part of a broader cultural condition. More recently, emerging themes such as post-truth operate as cultural epithets that are currently being augmented by notions of deep fakes, data farms, and artificial intelligence (AI). As such, this uncertainty or cultural anxiety about what constitutes truth provides the context for an accelerated proliferation of epistemologies, but also for this proliferation to cultivate ways of knowing that are gendered, or more precisely, epistemologies that appear remarkably masculine in character. The current COVID-19 pandemic provides us with a number of examples of how this might be the case.

We are at a moment where countries around the world have had their lockdowns lifted, reinstated and lifted again; the post-pandemic has become not the absence of a virus but the emergence of a different way of living. We mentioned in a previous issue that the linguistic frames of the virus had emerged: we had begun to speak about waves, plateaus, peaks, and troughs. It is now becoming clear that these geographic metaphors offer an often hastily sketched topography of fear, euphoria, threat, and elation. This topography, often graphically represented through rates of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, points to an affective telemetry, underpinned

by axes of timelines and population. Furthermore, not only is the affective being graphically represented; it is also being linguistically framed through cases, rates, figures, rolling averages, and so on. The implication of this is that a particular way of knowing has emerged to navigate uncertainties of the near future. The anxieties, the excitement, the pain, the desire and the hurt become cauterized by the anonymity of statistical representations. This framing and managing of insecurity feels very much like the ways men have traditionally managed uncertainty and anxiety. In other words, is it possible that the pandemic, as it has been reported on and framed by governments, could be understood as a gendering process? Feminist epistemology has enabled us to think carefully about how knowledge is constructed and the implicit (and explicit) bias embedded in how knowledge is constructed and represented. There is something rational, objective, controlled, and absent about the reporting of COVID that tends to leave behind personal narratives and instead appeal to the rational, objective and unbiased.

In contrast, anti-vaccine (anti-vax) protesters often speak with passion and intensity. Claims of the complete non-existence of the virus, claims that the vaccine contains microchips or that it is unsafe and causes deaths, and claims that vaccines have not undergone the rigorous testing that other vaccines have been subject to, speak differently than the statistics. The invocation of personal narratives and unique experiences points to something that resembles a classic standpoint epistemology. Briana Toole (2019) suggests that a standpoint epistemology tends to be based on the premise that non-epistemic aspects, such as identity, can impact how something is known: “One’s social identity may ‘open one up’ to evidence in ways that aren’t modeled by traditional epistemologies. It is this sense in which one’s social identity, a non-epistemic feature, makes a difference to what one is in a position to know” (2019: 600). Anti-vaxxers often claim that their skepticism gives them a unique understanding of the pandemic. Their standpoint provides them with an exceptional ability to understand how private businesses and the state cooperate to generate capital and (among a wide range of other practices) reduce civil liberties.

Fundamentally, we need to recognize that this is not simply about providing an alternative worldview; rather it is about the politics of how that worldview becomes represented. As Tomaz Da Silva (1999: 2) argues, “epistemology has to do fundamentally with representation: with the relationship between on the one hand, the ‘real’ and ‘reality,’ and, on the other, the forms through which this ‘real’ and this ‘reality’ become ‘present’ for us—*re-presented*.” In essence, what we see around the anti-vax campaigns is an

attempt to undermine particular scientific approaches to COVID through a re-presentation of scientific evidence. What is relevant for this journal is that this representation takes on gendered tropes, drawing upon existing strategies to undermine ways of being. Strikingly, unlike the systemic big data reporting on statistics, the anti-vaxxers often promote narratives that are emotively and physically aggressive. For example, what fueled outrage in the British press was the comparison of the doctors treating COVID with those doctors who were complicit in the killing of Jews in the Holocaust. Such reprehensible comments provoked headline responses across all media outlets. The number of deaths on the same day was not news. In many ways, anti-vax protestors employ a form of gaslighting: a strategy aimed at questioning self-beliefs and in doing so, denying a particular form of reality. Gaslighting has been associated with men who psychologically and physically abuse women and is often about establishing control and legitimizing authority claims. In their attempts to establish particular dominant narratives, gaslighters employ strategies that produce self-doubt and questioning of self-trust.

One of the areas where gaslighting often appears is around mask-wearing. Throughout the pandemic, this has been a highly contentious issue that has not simply been about whether masks are safe or not. Mask-wearing has become a symbolic space where issues such as individual liberty, state control, and legal rights have been contested. However, there has been much popular discussion of mask-wearing as a gendered practice. One highly popular gendering of resistance to mask-wearing has come through “Karen” videos and memes. The evolving representations of a “Karen”—a middle-class white woman whose social and cultural privilege is deemed an inalienable right—refusing to wear a mask have become widespread. Such videos delight in watching women’s ineffectual arrogance and the failure of their privilege. Such fails include women spitting at workers when they are asked to wear a mask, demanding to be served in a shop without wearing a mask, ringing the police because they have been asked to wear a mask or subpoenaing a store that refuses them entry for not wearing a mask. It is suggested that when men are faced with the loss of privilege, they resort to physical aggression in order to restore their privilege, and although there is talk of the “male Karen,” the “Greg,” or the “Ken” or “Kevin,” there is no cultural trope that characterizes men’s loss of privilege. One reason for this is that it is not simply the enjoyment of watching someone exercise a privilege and fail, but that it is a woman that is failing; men failing in the exercise of their privilege does not appear to carry equal attention. Perhaps a key con-

cern in the lack of memes or videos of men failing is that often masculinity is viewed as an individual characteristic or a psychological quality rather than a shared collective norm or value. Alongside this, the celebration of men failing continues to be something that remains culturally unpalatable.

In the *New York Times*, Alisha Gupta (2020) argues that not wearing a mask is a way of contesting and challenging a perception of vulnerability. A similar argument is made by Olivia Petter (2020): wearing the mask becomes a sign of weakness and the lack of a mask demonstrates strength and fearlessness. However, the difficulty with these accounts is that they reduce mask-wearing to an individual disposition or psychology. Instead, we need to understand the issues surrounding mask-wearing as embedded within the very architecture of masculinity itself. We need to keep in mind how the visual might exacerbate the fragility that is embedded in the identificatory trajectory of masculinity. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the mask has traditionally been associated with workplaces, especially dangerous ones: the steel industries, the military, space exploration, aeronautics and, of course, healthcare. Refusing to use a mask in these industries may not simply have been done as a means to show a masculinity, but because they may have restricted the ability to do a good job. For example, Martin Kosla's (2015) work with electricians noted how the use of gloves and masks was not just about being seen as masculine. It was about how the health and safety regulations that were enforced were resisted, not in order to demonstrate a masculinity, but because they impacted on electricians' ability to do a good job: "the unnecessary rules associated with electrical safety, especially their inability to work on live equipment, increased the time it took to complete tasks and therefore interfered with electricians' ability to complete quality work in a timely and cost-efficient way" (2015: 399). Here we can see that working cultures produced ways of demonstrating masculinity that were premised on the nature of the work being carried out.

It is suggested that traditional manhood itself was indicative of what the body did. There is no doubt that in such industries, health and safety equipment was not used but frowned upon. Not necessarily because it was effeminate—though it was undoubtedly class coded through health and safety regulations—but because it simply got in the way of doing a good job. Demonstrating masculinity was not necessarily the driving force behind the lack of mask-wearing, but rather became a characteristic residual of the work itself. In other words, the lack of a mask may not have been about signaling a tough masculinity, but because using one restricted one's capacity to achieve a masculinity. Perhaps some of that cultural memory has been

reconstituted: borrowing from Marx, at one time making a quality “thing” was a way of making masculinity. While the making of the thing has been lost, the cultural memory of taking off the mask as a means to demonstrate manliness remains culturally relevant.

The point in this editorial is that the architecture of masculinity and the processes involved in the accomplishing of masculinity have changed. Historically, masculinity has been a quality that has been understood as emanating from the body. As such, masculinity was not necessarily about how the body looked but what the body did. As a result, masculinity became framed through various employments, with particular jobs being (morally) indicative of being a real man. Historically, the architecture of masculinity was based on the maintenance of a form of bodily integrity where the abilities to craft, work hard, and use skills for labor were veridical of manhood. These qualities were important to the structuring of manhood; the commitment to the work and the quality of the work itself became veridical of the “truth of the self” or the kind of man one was. More recently, the relationship between the self and what it produces has been inverted so that manhood is not constituted by what it does, but what it is being seen to be doing. For example, Margaret Sommerville and Lena Abrahamsson (2016) highlight how working in the mining industry often involved dangerous and dirty working conditions. Such conditions, they argue, fed into the traditional images associated with men’s work. They note the emergence of a new structure of masculinity: one that has moved away from cultures of work based on a collective understanding to a focus on an individual’s body care. They suggest that:

new discourses of the body were contradictory to the construction and maintenance of traditional mining cultures and the related practices were unable to be translated by mine workers into their current work practices. While safety trainers implicitly reinforced a culture of masculinity on the one hand, they explicitly enacted new safety procedures and devalued workers’ long-held experiential knowledge on the other. (Sommerville and Abrahamsson 2016: 32)

As such, the visual is at work in the stabilizing and consolidating of masculinity, with outward signifiers themselves becoming instrumental to how masculinity is configured. This means that because the precarity of masculinity is temporarily resolved through an alignment with cultural imaginaries, that alignment often takes on visual forms through a semiotics of masculinity. As a result, masculinities become dependent upon a continual fixing of visual signifiers (or lack of them). The result of this, in the contemporary context, is that the question is not why men are wearing or not

wearing masks, but how the mask has become the symbolic space where masculinities become stabilized or dissolved.

In this issue, the articles speak in various ways to the means by which the visual becomes an important cypher of masculinity. Fundamentally this brings us back to the importance of epistemology, or how a range of epistemological approaches can help us to understand bodies, sexualities, and masculinities. Existing work on mask-wearing, where it is correlated with masculine norms of toughness, provide one way of understanding how the pandemic is being experienced and understood by men. But this is only one way. We need to cultivate and support other ways of seeing and understanding that operate alongside the disciplines that appear to be key reference points for discussions of masculinity. One of the features of the Arts and Humanities is that epistemologies often become diversified through practice, meaning that research can sometimes be a practice of creativity and imagining. Hopefully, this journal, by reaching out and becoming a platform for a range of approaches to bodies, masculinities and sexualities, can in some ways contribute to this.

The Editors

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