

**Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, eds.**

**The Masculinities Reader**

Polity Press, 2001, 400 pp.

\$15.99 paper (0-7456-2689-0), \$55.00 cloth (0-7456-2688-2)

**Rachel Adams and David Savran, eds.**

**The Masculinity Studies Reader**

Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 418 pp.

\$US 31.95 paper (0-631-22660-5), \$US 72.95 cloth (0-631-22659-1)

The study of gender is one of the key areas of research and theorizing to emerge since the accepted canonical approaches in the humanities and social sciences imploded in the 1970s. In sociology, this marked the end of the hegemony of first the functionalist approach and then various Marx-inspired models. The emergence of “readers” in masculinity is a sign that gender studies is now an established discipline in its own right with key texts and authors and that it can no longer be considered as a mere side bar to the more important work carried out in the liberal arts disciplines. As part of that movement that sees difference in all its complexity as perhaps the key issue in contemporary social and cultural analysis, men’s studies has come a long way since it first appeared as an often, but not always, sympathetic response to second wave feminism.

The editors of the two books under consideration here deserve to be congratulated for helping anyone who teaches an advanced undergraduate or graduate class in masculinity. The books bring together an interesting array of previously published writings that deal with various aspects of masculinity. For the most part, all the articles or excerpts from books were explicitly written to address gender issues. Adams and Savran’s text, intended for a cultural studies audience, however, includes two classic essays penned before the current vogue for gender studies began. Geertz’s famous piece on the Balinese cockfight and an excerpt from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask* offer two classic analyses of masculinity that were not self-consciously produced as such. Reading these two pieces in relation to the more recent and conscious efforts to analyze masculinity highlights the originality of Geertz and Fanon.

The writings collected in both texts present masculinity as a historically contingent, social and cultural construct. Although the only authors to have been excerpted in both collections are Robert Connell and Michael Kimmel, each book contains contributions that discuss the origins of contemporary hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, homosexuality, cultural variations in the expression of masculinity, and masculinity and the maintenance of social boundaries. Thus, there is overlap between the subject matter of the two collections, although only the collection explicitly targeted at sociologists (Whitehead and Barrett) contains a section that addresses the politics of change.

On the other hand, striking differences in the way sociologists and cultural studies specialists approach masculinity can be seen in the organization of the texts. Whitehead and Barrett open with a section entitled “Defining and Locating Masculinities” whereas Adams and Savran begin with “Eroticism.” The sociology reader is thereafter organized around common sociological themes: power and oppression,

the public and the private domain, and social, cultural and political change. The logic of the ordering of the Adams and Savran text is not quite as clear. The part labelled "Eroticism" is followed by sections entitled, respectively, "Social Sciences," "Representations," "Empire and Modernity" and "Borders." This ordering suggests that they could not quite decide whether to organize the book according to different disciplinary approaches to masculinity or according to themes. There are social scientific chapters to be found in all of the sections (note that all the science is of the "soft," qualitative rather than "hard," quantitative kind) and representation is also a concern in all of the book's divisions. The amount of attention given to sexuality is one of the marked differences between the two books, a variation that reflects the differential emphasis that concepts such as desire and need play in the two disciplines. Apparently sexual desire and preference are key issues in cultural studies whereas they are important but not absolutely central concerns for sociology.

While both books bring together important writings on masculinity, there are some significant absences. Neither of them give any significant play to Marxist-influenced interpretations of masculinity. Arguably, the members of the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham produced some of the most important earlier work on masculinity, albeit through the lens of a class-based analysis. The absence from both collections of a sample from the famous work of, for example, Paul Willis is surprising. Moreover, given the significance of sexuality as a theme, especially in the Adams and Savran reader, the absence of a piece by Foucault is also striking.

Another weakness of both books is that not enough attention is paid to the linkages between masculinity and neo-conservatism as a political movement. The last section in Whitehead and Barrett does contain chapters that address this issue to some extent and there is, to be sure, much discussion of heterosexual masculinity as the dominant and oppressive term in the gender system in both books. However, neither book contains an essay that deals at length with the elements of the men's movement that students and the general public are most likely to be aware of: Robert Bly and the mytho-poetic men's movement, the Million Man march, father's rights campaigns, or one of the other many conservative expressions of masculine identity that abound. These developments represent an important element of contemporary masculinity and deserve more attention than they get in either of these readers. That being said, however, these two books are valuable contributions and will prove to be useful tools for courses in masculinity.

Cultural Studies and Sociology have had an ambivalent relationship from the mid-1970s when the former began as an interdisciplinary offshoot of literary studies and cultural Marxist sociology in Britain. The discipline of sociology has at times been worried about the new interdisciplinary movements (in addition to cultural studies, there is, of course, women's studies, and various ethnic studies programs) poaching on its theoretical and empirical territory, not to mention students and institutional budgets. Although these two books have their commonalities, there are sufficient differences between them to suggest that sociologists need not worry too much about having to share their theoretical and empirical heritage with the upstart interdisciplinary approaches.

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<http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/cjscopy/reviews/masculinities.html>

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