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INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY: THE CHANGING NATURE OF MASCULINITIES

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INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY: THE CHANGING NATURE OF MASCULINITIES by Eric Anderson. New York & London, Routledge, 2009, 190 pp.

Anderson's Inclusive Masculinity challenges the dominant discourse in masculinity studies, that masculinity is rooted in both anti-femininity and homophobia, by exploring how masculinity is changing among university men, and particularly athletes. Through a series of compelling ethnographies, Anderson demonstrates that these changes are not just in attitudes, but also in the practices of these men. These changes lead him to develop a theory of inclusive masculinity, which while not completely unseating previous theories of masculinity, challenges masculinity theorists to consider alternative forms of masculinity that neither accept nor protest culturally dominant forms of masculinity.

The ethnographies in this work are particularly interesting because they are conducted in settings that have typically been thought to reproduce traditional forms of masculinity, several college sports teams and one fraternity. The men in Anderson's study come from a diverse selection of sports teams, including traditionally masculine sports, such as rugby and soccer, but also the less traditionally masculine sport of cheerleading. Additional interviews with gay athletes from a multitude of sports supplement these ethnographies. The fact that inclusive forms of masculinity are found in all of these arenas is compelling evidence for Anderson's theory of inclusive masculinity.

Inclusive masculinity challenges Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity by demonstrating that viable alternative forms of masculinities are being displayed by the men he studies. He argues that this is not just a form of protest masculinity, because it does not challenge hegemonic, or what he terms "orthodox" masculinity. Rather inclusive and orthodox masculinities are able to coexist as equally valued forms of masculinity that do not compete against one another for dominance. He argues that inclusive masculinity has been able to emerge due to recent changes in how men define their masculinity.

Although Anderson recognizes the importance of homophobia and fear of feminization in defining masculinity in the past, and how orthodox masculinity is still defined in this way, he argues that these features are becoming less important to the men he studies,

which allows for the emergence of more inclusive forms of masculinity. He demonstrates that men displaying inclusive forms of masculinity have little fear of being stigmatized as homosexual by their peers. Gay athletes report mostly positive coming out experiences, male cheerleaders are not concerned with other people's perceptions of their sexual orientation, fraternity members openly recruit gay men, and rugby players resent their coach's homophobic insults. Perhaps most shockingly, many of the men maintained heterosexual identities despite kissing other men publicly, admitting to same-sex desires, or even engaging in homosexual acts. In addition to increasing acceptance of homosexuality, inclusive forms of masculinity also accept more effeminate displays by men and have more positive attitudes toward women. The strong ties between being labeled homosexual and effeminate are obvious, as many of the above examples would be labeled as both. Although it may not be surprising that male cheerleaders had positive attitudes toward women, given that they were teammates, similar attitudes were found among the fraternity men and rugby players as well. The numerous examples that Anderson provides are convincing evidence that more inclusive forms of masculinity are increasingly available to the men he studies.

Despite this evidence, it is difficult to overlook the privileged status of the men in these studies, who are overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, and middle- to upper-middle class athletes and fraternity members. It is arguable that this privilege is exactly what enables these men to engage in homoerotic, homosexual, and effeminate behaviors with impunity. Even the gay athletes that are interviewed are likely privileged in terms of race, class, and the social standing associated with being athletes, which may place them in a position where their homosexuality is not suspected. This is not to say that the men in the study do not display the attitudes and behaviors that Anderson presents, but to point out that inclusive forms of masculinity may actually only be available to a select group of otherwise privileged men.

Anderson also minimizes the importance that his own sexuality may have played in conducting this research. He finds consistently that the men in his ethnographies are accepting of homosexuality, but he fails to interrogate how his openness about his own homosexuality may have influenced them to portray accepting attitudes, or even how their positive associations with him may have actually decreased their own homophobia. Many of the men discussed how they used to be homophobic, and further interrogation of this issue would have been useful in understanding how those changes came about and if they were in any way influenced by Anderson's own identity.

Finally, it is unclear whether inclusive forms of masculinity are actually coexisting alongside orthodox forms of masculinity without vying for dominance as Connell's theory would suggest. Although this seems to be the case in Anderson's account, it is possible that inclusive masculinities are just beginning to emerge and may come to challenge orthodox forms of masculinity as the hegemonic form of masculinity. Of course that question cannot be answered at present, which makes Anderson's theory all the more relevant for continuing research.

Despite these limitations, Inclusive Masculinity challenges the dominant discourse in masculinities studies and interrogates whether multiple forms of masculinity can coexist as equally valuable expressions of masculinity. Further, his work pushes the boundaries of masculinity studies by questioning whether masculinity necessarily must be defined in opposition to either femininity or homosexuality. These are challenges that future masculinities scholars simply cannot ignore, making Anderson's work a significant contribution to masculinities studies.

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