

Men and Masculinities

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Book Reviews

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Eric Anderson

Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities New York & London: Routledge, 2009. 204 pp. \$105.00. ISBN 978-0-415-80462-2

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This is a provocative book that proposes an alternative theoretical framework for thinking about masculinities. It elaborates a theory of *inclusive masculinity* as a challenge to Connell's notion of "hegemonic masculinity" which, the author claims, "is unable to capture the complexity of what occurs as cultural homophobia diminishes" (p. 7). This notion of decreasing homophobia and of reduced stigmatization of gay men's sexuality is at the heart of Anderson's thesis about the changing nature of heteromascularity within the context of sport and, specifically, among university aged, white, male athletes. Anderson draws on multiple ethnographic studies within university contexts in both the United States and the United Kingdom to document what he identifies as significant changes occurring in the way that straight men are expressing and understanding masculinity. He uses research conducted with gay male athletes, heterosexual male cheerleaders, a mainstream fraternity, a rugby team, and a soccer team. He also draws on research with both male athletes attending a small Catholic university in the Midwest and with soccer players at a major East Coast U.S. city, as well as on a study with British high school male students, all of whom, apparently, exhibit characteristics of inclusive masculinity, understood in terms of their overt or explicit rejection of homophobia: "decreased homophobia is the hallmark of inclusive masculinities" (p. 114). In fact, central to Anderson's assertion about inclusive masculinities is the absence or diminished significance of homophobia in these men's lives which lead them not only to accept openly gay athletes as their team mates but also to embrace same sex expressions of intimacy, such as kissing and physically embracing one another, while disavowing any erotic or sexual intent. However, while Anderson emphasizes that many of his straight participants are embracing gay men and homosexuality, which is presented as the hallmark of inclusive masculinity, this does not mean that the operation of hegemony through resorting to "exclusionary heterosexist discourse" is not prevalent. In short, these men still feel the need to prove their heterosexuality, but Anderson claims that they do so without necessarily having to use homophobia (p. 118).



This extrication of homophobia from heterosexism or the notion that the “heterosexism is an independent variable to homophobia,” as well as the assertion that diminishing homophobia can help explain the phenomenon that straight men are embracing more inclusive masculinities, raise some questions about the conceptual limits of such a theoretical perspective as it is elaborated by Anderson. The very system of heterosexism, as it is manifested in the need to assert or to prove one’s heterosexuality, is built on a psychic repudiation of homosexual or same-sex desire. Similarly, men who have sex with men, while explicitly denying that they are gay or claiming to be heterosexual, requires some discussion of biphobia and a more thorough engagement with the literature that deals with the limits of categories of sexual identification in their capacity to capture the complexity of the expression, enactment, and negotiation of same-sex desire. Such complexity has been captured by Simpson, for example, who uses analytic categories and conceptual frameworks derived from queer theoretical perspectives to make sense of the queering of masculinities in his *It’s a Queer World* (1996). He notes that the “cross-over of gayness into the mainstream,” with the accompanying onslaught of consumerism in late capitalist economies, does not necessarily mean that homophobia and discrimination against homosexuals has decreased (p. 18; see also Janoff’s *Pink Blood: Homophobic violence in Canada*, 2005). In addition, the tendency for many straight men to transgress hegemonic masculinity, Simpson argues, is still “adamantly presented as something that is not homosexual, and in fact proof of their heterosexuality—I’m so secure in my masculinity that . . .” (p. 7). A sense of such adamant assertions of heterosexuality by men in Anderson’s study, in response to literally embracing gay men, however, are presented as examples of straight men “undoing” their homophobia as a result of decreasing cultural homophobia.

It is important to emphasize, however, that while some male subjects in Anderson’s study talked about engaging in prolonged public kissing as part of their homosocial banter, such behavior normally occurred during nights out at dance clubs and always took place while under the influence of alcohol. One subject claimed to be get “particularly kissy” while under the influence of alcohol but was adamant that “it’s not a sexual thing.” Another participant comments that such acts “are sexual but not sexual” but all subjects appear to be insisting that such intimate acts are not erotic. While Anderson does claim that there is “no objective way” of measuring such interpretations, he is too quick to resort to a theory of inclusive masculinity as an explanatory framework for investigating the complexity of desire and the heteronormative framing of it vis-à-vis the practice of heterosexuality and the social organization of masculinity. Such a critical focus is consistent with Connell’s theorization of masculinities which, despite Anderson’s rejection of the conceptual category of hegemony as it is deployed by Connell, continues to be a very useful framework for addressing questions related to both gay and straight men’s complicity in maintaining the patriarchal dividend. This is not to deny that some men are indeed embracing antisexist and anti-homophobic practices, as Anderson clearly illustrates, but the extent to which this is an all pervasive phenomenon due to decreasing homophobia is not convincing, particularly given significant literature

in the field, which presents a very different reality (see Dorais's *Dead Boys can Dance: Sexual Orientation, Masculinity and Suicide*, 2004 and Bergling's book *Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior*, 2001, as well as Kimmel's *Guyland: The Perilous World where Boys become Men*, 2008).

In addition, as already illustrated in the field of equity and social justice education more broadly, notions of inclusivity and their association with celebrating and accepting cultural difference, are limited in their capacity to address the complexity of power relations and the persistent influence of new forms of racism. This applies equally to notions of inclusivity as they apply to the persistence of homophobia, despite the increasing visibility and acceptance of homosexuality within the popular culture. In this sense, a more thorough engagement with theory, as well as literature that highlights the persistence of hegemonic masculinities and homophobia in schools and within the context of fraternities, needs to be incorporated into a discussion about the apparent reduction of *cultural homophobia*, as it pertains to the undoing of homophobia and violence against women and gay men. Kimmel, in his latest book, *Guyland*, for example, documents the persistence of homophobia, antigay sentiments and femiphobia, as well as the impact of gender nonconformity on boys and men in high school and university contexts and specifically comments on hazing initiation rites as they pertain to the sporting arena and fraternity membership. Reading such literature raises serious questions about the extent to which inclusive masculinities are being embraced by straight men.

Further explicit engagement with Connell's work and with the debates around the use of hegemonic masculinity would have also been helpful (see Hearn's article, "From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men" in *Feminist Theory* 5:1, 2004; the article of Wetherell and Edley, "Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices" in *Feminism & Psychology* 9:3, 1999; the article by Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept" in *Gender & Society*, 19:6, 2005; Martino's "The lure of hegemonic masculinity" in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 21:6, 2008). This literature is particularly important, given that Anderson claims the notion of hegemony masculinity fails to capture the complexity of contemporary relations of masculinity. Connell in his book, *Masculinities*, 1995, however, rejects presenting hegemonic and marginalized masculinities as "fixed character types" or archetypes and instead treats them as "configurations of practice, generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships." Anderson explains such a changing structure of relationships in terms of decreasing *cultural homophobia*, which remains unconvincing in light of significant literature in the field.

This is a thought-provoking book that challenges current approaches to theorizing masculinities. It provides a forum for vigorous debate about the use of theory and its methodological implications, as it relates to researching masculinities, male power, desire, and heteronormative male privilege within the context of globalization and postindustrial economies.

