

## Book Reviews

*Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity* by Jennifer Harding. London: Sage Publications, 1998, vi + 154pp.

Jennifer Harding begins *Sex Acts* by reminding the reader that notions and theories of sexuality, past and present, are highly contested. Therein, sexuality opens the way for seemingly endless studies by “academia, politics and popular culture where it is subject to attempts to define, explain and change it” (p. 1). Harding’s work examines contemporary discourses of sexuality in the public and private domains, and it connects this analysis to everyday/night performative practices of femininity and masculinity. The latter are illustrated via various media-based case studies.

*Sex Acts* is grounded in an understanding of sexuality as discourse. From this point Harding is able to explore sexuality, and later gender, in and through various discourses that help to construct current understandings of sexuality such as science, medicine, motherhood, queer theory, feminism, and post-modernism. These various discourses are, of course, subject to their situatedness within historical and cultural contexts. This framework allows Harding to begin to challenge “the assumption that sex is natural, intractable and self-evidently written on the body” (p. 3).

This research is a product of the author’s doctoral work and draws heavily on her earlier works on gender, feminism and science. *Sex Acts* begins by presenting how sex, that is to say biology, has traditionally been understood as a “natural” binary and as an essentialist construction. Harding then takes up how sex is defined through public and private discourses. She illustrates the political potential of visibility and identity and contemporary re/constructions of public sexuality that have had the effect of shifting boundaries of understanding sexualities. For example, Harding points out how “since the advent of HIV/AIDS epidemic, a discourse of risk has colonized sexual behaviour and has attempted to construct new ways of expressing sexual desire” (36). Judith Butler’s theory of gender as a series of performative acts is used to structure much of Harding’s re/presentation of sex, sexuality, and identity. This way of understanding masculinities and femininities is used by Harding as a lynchpin to collapse dependence on the supposed “naturalness” of oppressive gender and sexual binaries.

Central to the work is an examination of how, within both scientific and popular

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discourse, “*sex hormones* have been viewed as powerful determinants of sexual difference, providing a point of origin for sex and a mechanism whereby sexual difference is expressed on the body as a ‘natural’ fact” (pp. 57-58). Thus, hormones have been used to explain away (“scientifically”) inequalities between men and women. Over many chapters, Harding traces the history of hormones up to and including the present usage of hormone replacement therapy for post-menopausal women. She illustrates how femininity is socially and medically constructed in post-menopausal women. She follows up this investigation by demonstrating how masculinity is also constructed, or fortified, through the discourse of science. This is illustrated through an examination of contemporary media blitz over “gender-bending” pollution in the United Kingdom. Various media contributed to a panic over environmental estrogens which have been blamed for lower sperm count in men and male genital deformities in British wildlife. Harding points out that much of the panic may stem from a resistance to the disruption of the “natural” order of gender and sex in the wider society. Scientifically, it is argued, there is a chemical/biological threat to males in the form of “female hormones”—estrogens, which are “feminizing” men (p. 79). “The female body is configured as an encroaching, colonizing space” (pp. 88-89). This example offers the opportunity to begin to explore how masculinity and male sexuality are often defined by sex organs and sperm counts.

If masculinity is defined via the physical and biological body, then femininity becomes defined by the female body’s ability to reproduce. Again, the reader is drawn back to the essentializing of sex and gender. Harding then deconstructs the concept of motherhood. She argues that the construction of motherhood has led to the policing of motherhood, that is, determining who can “legitimately” be a mother. In an age of new reproductive technologies, the exploration of “legitimate” motherhood draws out many more questions that fracture further identities and disrupt gender and sex.

The chapter which follows “Sexuality and the Maternal Body” explores “Queer Families,” lesbian mothers, single mothers, teen mothers and the rise of families created through artificial insemination. Harding illustrates the many ways that these queer families challenge what we have come to see as the “naturalness” of a “particular series of investments in a sexed body, which is always already accepted as irrefutably male or female” (p. 133).

One weakness of *Sex Acts* is the engagement with contemporary masculine identities and the new literature in this area. While Harding does use changing masculinities to illustrate some of her points, her analysis of the complexities of masculine identities seems to be more supplementary to her greater arguments, which are solidly grounded in the female body and women’s experience. This alone does not negate the usefulness of the text itself. However, with “Practices of Femininity and Masculinity” as a subtitle, as a reader, I expected a closer look at masculinities than was provided.

Despite this weakness, *Sex Acts* offers many case-study examples of contemporary disruptions of biological and (hetero)sex assumptions. Such disruptions force the reader to re-think what many have come to believe as truths about bodies and sex. Overall, Harding’s text offers a carefully presented argument that begins to pull apart myths and discursive positionings of biological sex, gender, and sexuality.

Such a text would be a useful resource when addressing gender or sexualities in an upper-level/advanced undergraduate class.

KEVIN G. DAVIDSON  
Mt. Saint Vincent's College

*Male to Male: Sexual Feelings Across the Boundaries of Identity* by Edward J. Tejirian. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000, 382pp.

Few topics evoke so much anxiety and pleasure, pain and hope, discussion and silence as the erasure of the much supported dualistic framing of sexuality. Edward Tejirian in *Male to Male: Sexual Feelings Across the Boundaries of Identity* suggests that the “nuances and complexities of emotion and meaning embedded in people’s sexual experience” are often stripped away in order to place people into categories for analysis. In his attempt to combine the subjective components of sexual experience—emotion and meaning—and the analysis of the subjective experience of culture, Tejirian does a fine job of filling in the gap left by both essentialist and purely constructionist approaches to the question surrounding sexuality. In order to accomplish this, he has spoken to men and women who were candid about their sexual feelings. The result of this scholarship is a troubling of the categories of heterosexual and homosexual.

Tejirian has found a comfortable balance in this presentation of thoughts and feelings on the topic of human (male) sexual desire and identity. He does this by including lengthy (unedited) narratives by those represented in this text. The personal accounts of love, loss, power-lust, insecurity, and hate read like your best friend’s romances or like your own worst nightmares. The ease with which I found myself relating to the contents of this book is indeed one of the reasons behind my continued interest in this work—although, at times, not without dismay.

Tejirian’s analysis of human attraction walks the line between the a-poetical alchemy of sexual attraction and intellect, whereby, as Tejirian suggests, “representations in the mind are still shrouded in darkness,” and the brutality of rape. At times I was, indeed, confounded by Tejirian’s presentation of the variations in human lust and desire.

Simply put, *Male to Male* is a book of stories relating personal accounts of human, sexual, social, and cultural exploration from which Tejirian derives his principle supposition that sexual orientation is an “emotional response.” Although I appreciated his willingness to disrupt the boundaries of sexual attraction, I believe Tejirian engaged in an unnecessarily limited critical examination of human attraction by excluding the political, aesthetic, and intellectual conditions of affection from his discussion of the power and implications of the “image of the body.” Indeed, the content of the transcriptions located throughout this text provided ample opportunity for a more in-depth examination of the complex interplay between mind, spirit, and body.

After multiple chapters of personal accounts of sexual desire, emotional explorations, and intellectual vacillations, *Male to Male* leaves the reader exhausted and in search of respite in the closing analysis. However, Tejirian does not afford us this

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chance except in a brief synopsis in which he purports that “men’s sexual feelings for each other spring from male identity ... and human identity”: as though male identity and human identity exist as a template for masculinity. The finality by which this remarkable collection of experience and ideas come to an end was unsettling in and of itself, given my current conceptualization of masculinity and queer theory as existing in the everyday, the humdrum, and in the inter-subjectivity of social engagements and personal narratives. I feel strongly that this text has more to offer than I gleaned from my first read. And it is with this sentiment that I recommend this text to others. By chance or by method, Tejirian has indeed found the space between discourse and desire—located in the thoughts, enacted and suppressed, that each of us experiences in our own explorations and examinations of sexual attraction and identity. came?

**BLYE FRANK**

*Mt. Saint Vincent’s College*

*The Men and the Boys* by Robert B. Connell. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, 259pp.

*The Men and the Boys* was, as I anticipated, a pleasure to read. The depth of Bob Connell’s intellect and insight with respect to gender, masculinities, and the social complexities of the negotiated social experience are evidenced again in this profound and enjoyable book.

*The Men and the Boys* is contextualized within a concern for the condition of masculinity and its implications for boys and men in the global social arena. That is, Connell does what others rarely attempt in the field of masculinities by locating the cause of concern and hope on a scale that crosses social, political, and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, Connell approaches the notion of inequities within masculinity by considering the role boys and men play in reinforcing their own (dis)advantage: be it in the public schools setting, within cultural institutions such as competitive sport, or in the arena of organized civil disobedience.

Connell positions the masculine body itself as an arena upon which the struggles of gender and masculinity are “drawn into history.” This, he suggests, occurs as a process of “violence and body culture in the construction and politics of masculinities.” Furthermore, Connell posits that masculinities are created as an outcome of “specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed.” As such, masculinities, just as other social constructions, can be demarcated in terms of historical social events—an idea itself that disrupts the fixity of gender as it is most commonly perceived.

*The Men and the Boys* is in some regards a historical journey of gender discovery and analysis. After first contextualizing his conception of masculinities, Connell explores in short and clearly articulated segments the many elements comprising the current discourses in gender and masculinities. Connell offers us readable and approachable reviews, in chapter summary format, of issues pertaining to masculinities and globalization, competitive sport as a gender-defining institution, the inter-subjective relations of male bodies, the implications of gender status in securing power and authority, the problematics of teaching boys masculinities, the health-

did you mean to cap “the”?

related implications in the masculinized body, and peace and the gender politics of social reform.

Of particular interest to me in my own research and writing is Connell's treatment of the role of schools "as masculinity-making devices." Educators and others in the business of social and cultural construction through institutionalized teaching and learning typically do not recognize their role in the production and perpetuation of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity—either through their own complicity or by way of clearly defined heterosexism and homophobia. Indeed, as Connell suggests, "schools do not simply adapt to a natural masculinity among boys or in a natural delete "in"? femininity among girls." Schools are "active in the matter of constructing particular forms of gender and negotiating relations between them." For readers whose central interest lies not in examining the socio-politics of gender in public schooling, Connell's contextualization of schools as gender training grounds has other value—insofar as his examination of gender and schooling incites the reader to question this so-called "active construction of gender" and sex-role stereotyping and its associated detrimental outcomes. Gender outcomes, he suggests, are manifested as both social and physical events: in the workplace, in the home, in relationships, and in men's health—exemplified in men's propensity for a shorter and riskier set of life circumstances.

Indeed, "different forms of masculinity exist together and the hegemony of any given form is constantly subject to challenge." The notion of "challenge" was the central concept and identifier for me in this work: the challenge of masculinity and ego in protest; the challenge in gender reform of the past 30 years, guided by the feminist critique and the widely embraced postmodernist analysis; and the challenge of violence in the culture of boys and men. The challenge of masculinity then may very well be situated in constructing a "strategy for peace" that includes the necessity for a "strategy of change in masculinities."

*The Men and the Boys* is an exquisitely written and constructed text that offers its readership the challenge of gender reform. By no means does Connell imply that this is a simple task, but rather that it is one that requires understanding, passion, commitment, and a willingness to challenge gender constructs in the incarnation of everyday masculinities that are boys and men.

**BLYE FRANK**

*Mt. Saint Vincent's College*

*The Erotic Whitman* by Vivian R. Pollak. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 285 pp.

Walt Whitman (1819-92), generally considered the father of modern American poetry, has also been valued in the past two decades as a leading literary spokesman for gay masculinity, a writer whose pioneering quest for sexual freedom and social reform involved a challenge to the homophobia and misogyny of his culture. Now, with new developments in gender studies, a new perspective on the complexities of this singer "of the body electric" seems in order, especially for a poet whose tensions and conflicts have resulted in famously ambivalent texts. How, for example, do readers react

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when the subject of sexuality in *Leaves of Grass* varies from the overt to the covert, from the restrained to the excessive, from the homosexual to heterosexual? Is Whitman's sexual imagery to be seen primarily as a metaphor for political or social interaction, or is it the cry of a lonely man frustrated with the restrictions of his culture?

Vivian Pollak's important new psychobiography, *The Erotic Whitman*, responds to these and other questions by combining a close reading of the verse with insights into the poet's emotional life, which she sees as divided and conflicted. She also illuminates some of the short fiction and offers fresh insights into Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. Pollak's study is a balanced, carefully nuanced critique of gender politics in 19th century America and a thorough examination of a life story full of fears and contradictions. Challenging the image of Whitman as sexually insatiable, she explores his need for caution in expressing his sexuality in Victorian America as well as his use of poetry to reduce the inner conflict between a dream of sexual freedom and a confining, heterosexist literary tradition. She insists that he was both seduced and threatened by the beautiful male body, fearing what Whitman considered the sadistic element in sexuality at the same time that he was critical of sexual repression.

Pollak differs from some gay readers of Whitman in asserting that the poet is "not simply leading us toward the promised land of male-male love" (p. 147) but expresses homoerotic desire "at several removes." Pollak's Whitman, shaped by his semiliterate mother's temperament, could not, despite the bravado of his public persona, always believe in himself or trust his audience. His character and culture resisted the major shift in expressing sexual freedom that he claimed to seek. Unhappy, restless, "he experienced a loss of *passional?* identity at home, which continued to plague him," Pollak writes. "Whitman turned to his readers for continuing affirmation of his identity" (p. 96). He both wanted to be understood and was afraid of being understood; his emotional life, given the erotic vulnerability of his temperament and experience, required the cultivation of anonymity and the expression of desire in various ambivalent voices. Pollak sees the poet's disappointments in love turn into a "song of his faith in sex," whereby his art helped him resist the melancholy tide that had submerged his father.

As a young writer, Whitman combined a rough, hypermasculine persona with an urban gentleman's pose as he observed and manipulated his own inner life: only in literature, Pollak says, could he indulge his homoerotic fantasies. Hence "textual sex" was the solution to the psychological, social, and political dilemmas he could not resolve in his life. Although calling himself "the phallic choice of America," he felt insecure about his artistic voice; only the tender speaker of the *Calamus* poems from *Leaves of Grass* rescued him from relying on his rough persona. Yet even these complex, ambivalent poems raise questions for the poet: Can an illicit love affair ending unhappily be publicly acknowledged? How will loneliness and disgrace affect the poet's writing and relation to his readers? The masculine poet-persona is seen as troubled by his own erotic cowardice, and his secret renunciation of homosexual love is the negative result of male-male romantic obsessions, which reinforce the isolation that the democratic ideal of brotherhood in *Leaves of Grass* was intended to revise. Yet Whitman came close to freeing himself from ambivalence about intimate male bonding, Pollak suggests, by envisioning an ideal American

democracy of the future, thus combining personal and political motives. As the author states,

His homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual “democracy” was a psychological and political construct. It neutralized his characteristic suspicion of male-male intimacy and affirmed the social value of non-coercive, sympathetic affection between men. The boundaries between homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual relations were constantly redefined by his literary project; he transgressed these historically familiar limits joyfully and at his peril. (p. 152)

If Whitman tells a life story full of contradictions, *The Erotic Whitman* analyzes these contradictions carefully and makes a valuable addition to the four or five other significant biographies of the poet published since 1995. For students of Whitman, and for others interested in the literary construction of gender identity, Vivian Polak’s study is likely to become essential reading.

**GERALD J. SCHIFFHORST**  
*University of Central Florida*

*The Gendered Society* by Michael S. Kimmel. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, xii + 315 pp.

*The Gendered Society Reader* edited by Michael S. Kimmel with Amy Aronson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, viii + 391 pp.

These two texts are intended for undergraduates in sociology and other social sciences interested in sex, gender, and sexuality issues. Both texts, however, encourage multidisciplinary reading and should be attractive to anyone interested in these issues. Although Kimmel’s *The Gendered Society* is similar in focus to Epstein’s *Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender and the Social Order* (1988), his work is more than just “old wine in a new bottle.” Kimmel provides up-to-date information on issues of sex and gender and expands Epstein’s premises that “social order creates ‘nature’” (Epstein, 1988, p. 12) and that what appear to be differences based on gender are due to other social and biological factors. Kimmel also promises to bring men back into discussions of gender where they have long been absent.

The attention Kimmel gives to the principle that gender differences are the outcomes of inequality based on sex and gender is thematic throughout *The Gendered Society*. The book’s introduction is very strong and provides the reader with a clear background of the epistemology of sex and gender during the last several decades. He subtly attacks pop psychology’s reaffirmation of gender differences (what he calls the “‘interplanetary’ theory of complete and universal gender difference”) with sound theory and research. The remainder of the text is divided into three sections. The first, “Explanations of Gender,” tackles the natural sciences vs. social sciences explanations of variation by sex and gender. Kimmel includes chapters on biological, cross-cultural, psychological, and social constructionist viewpoints, providing

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the reader with a well-rounded and multidisciplinary grounding in the research. The second section of the text, entitled “Gendered Identities, Gendered Institutions,” focuses the reader’s attention on three areas: family, education (the classroom), and work. Clearly addressing macro perspectives, Kimmel investigates three key social institutions and elucidates sex, gender, and sexuality within them. These three chapters do a good job of illustrating stratification by providing useful empirical evidence and concise dialogue. The third section, “Gendered Interactions,” shifts the focus to more micro issues of sex, gender, and sexuality. The three chapters in this section deal with intimacies, sexualities, and violence. Kimmel’s chapter on sexualities is broad and inclusive, providing the reader with ample dialogue on the intersection of gender and sexuality. The chapters on intimacies and violence also do a good job of highlighting the gendering of behavior in contemporary society. Although his organization appears to make a distinct split between macro and micro issues, he makes sure that he provides structural and interactionist examples throughout both sections.

Kimmel attempts to make good on his promise to “bring men back into the discussion of gender” by using the scarce resources available to incorporate male experiences and perspectives on sex, gender, and sexualities. His examples provide an interesting addition to this area of study. Probably the chapters on education and sexualities best illustrate this.

What is missing from this book are explicit discussion of race/ethnicity, politics and the state, and class and power. This is not to say that these issues are omitted, but they are not focal to or elaborated upon in the text. Given the current emphasis in the sociology of sex and gender to situate analyses within social constructionist frameworks, it is unfortunate that the author chose not to incorporate issues of diversity of social experiences more fully in this book. on  
situating?

The companion anthology, *The Gendered Society Reader*, follows the organization of *The Gendered Society* and provides collections of essays that are directly related to each chapter. The selections are well chosen in regard to the goals of the parent text, and Kimmel (with Aronson) has gathered the writings of a number of well-known social scientists. They are successful in bringing men back into the gender discussion through a number of selected readings, both classic and contemporary. For example, one of the readings in the section on biology and society, “The Trouble with Testosterone: Will Boys Just Be Boys?” by Robert M. Sapolsky, offers an excellent contemporary critique of popular conceptions of the causal links between male aggression and testosterone and emphasizes the need to understand biological data within a social context. In the section on culture, Kimmel (with Aronson) includes a classic piece by John W. M. Whiting, Richard Kluckhohn, and Albert Anthony entitled “The Function of Male Initiation Ceremonies at Puberty,” which examines male gender rituals among 56 societies. Originally published in the 1950s, this essay focuses on father-son, mother-son interactions as gender-producing experiences. It is somewhat questionable whether this essay stands up to the test of time, given the more contemporary perspectives on gender construction. However, the essay does provoke discussion. Another selection that does an excellent job of representing men in research on gender is Scott Coltrane’s “Household Labor and the Routine Production of Labor.” This essay focuses on family labor as a gender-producing activity. Coltrane provides a lengthy discussion on fathers, supported by

qualitative interview data.

Kimmel (with Aronson) also includes some important essays for students of sex, gender, and sexuality. Most notably, the inclusion of Candace West's and Don H. Zimmerman's essential "Doing Gender" should be lauded. This essay clearly presents the social constructionist perspectives on sex and gender and should be included in any contemporary anthology on sex, gender, and sexuality.

The anthology would be more useful to the reader if there were brief chapter introductions that provided a context for the essays. Although Kimmel's *The Gendered Society* is intended to do such, it is insufficient—especially if the anthology is used alone. As stated above, it is debatable whether some of the "classic" entries are useful to the contemporary debate on sex, gender, and sexuality without a discussion of them in a particular context. The use of "classical" and "contemporary" headings along with contextualized discussions of each section's content would strengthen the anthology.

Finally, something else is missing from *The Gendered Society Reader*: a focus on race/ethnicity, politics and the state, and class and power. Like the parent text, the anthology falls short in these areas. As comparison, Anderson and Collins' *Race, Class and Gender* (1998) does a much better job of incorporating these issues within a discussion of sex, gender, and sexuality. The Anderson and Collins reader also attempts to provide information on men and masculinities, although not as explicitly as Kimmel (with Aronson).

Overall, *The Gendered Society* and *The Gendered Society Reader* are complementary texts with some very useful and relevant information on sex, gender, and sexuality. Kimmel's goals are commendable. Men should be brought back into the discussion, and gender differences should be examined as an outcome of gender inequality, and not the causes of it.

**DAPHNE JOHN**  
*Oberlin College*

***Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*** by Susan Faludi. New York: William Morrow, 1999, 662 pp.

In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, a sweetheart among feminists takes on a topic rife with controversy: the crisis of modern white American masculinity. On the face of it, a reader might expect this book to be about how men are feeling sorry for themselves because of the feminist challenge to their dominant position in society. Indeed, such a study might ask, "How dare kings complain about their castles?" (p. 13). Faludi's book, on the contrary, is actually the story of her own intellectual journey; she begins with the assumption that American masculinity is somehow flawed and eventually moves to a place where she concludes that American culture is flawed. She finds that the problems of modern masculinity are caused by what has been done to men as much as what men have done to themselves. Faludi treats men's problems with honesty and dignity. She blends popular anecdotes, personal interviews, firsthand experiences, and scholarly research into her narrative analysis.

According to Faludi, fathers have betrayed sons. She is critical of the so-called

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“greatest” generation, the American men who fought in World War II. In winning that war, these men returned to their civilian lives with many promises: no more layoffs, no more divorces, and no more losses. They returned from the war to provide the good life for their sons in the “baby boom” generation. In their roles as fathers, the veterans, Faludi believes, grew “remote, unreadable, an enforcer of conformity, a cold war man” (p. 36). This greatest generation expected great achievements from their sons; however, the fathers set up economic, social, and political systems in which most sons could not succeed. Thus, sons could not realize the fathers’ expectations. Moreover, these sons have found their fathers’ promises to be empty. Instead, young men suffer from the loss of context in which they were heroes, the loss of employment that allowed them to wear business suits, and the loss of a family that required them to be providers. Faludi argues that the greatest generation failed to nourish its sons or prepare them for the challenges of the post-war world. Fathers never admitted their failures or betrayals.

Using a wide variety of case studies to illustrate the betrayal and despair, Faludi interacted with a variety of male groups and organizations: blue-collar workers at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, fans of the original Cleveland Browns, members of Promise Keepers, veterans of the Vietnam conflict, and actors in the pornography industry. Faludi shows that these men of the post-World War II generations have felt helpless to understand or defeat or reconcile two intertwined challenges.

First, young men have been deprived of masculine achievement in virtually every area of their lives. When they can neither fulfill their duties nor assert their authority, they may lash out at their families and communities. Or, they may turn to other means of masculine achievement such as bodybuilding. Faludi terms such men as “feminized muscle men” and “hood ornaments.” The results are broken homes, abusive relationships, rampant alcoholism, or unhappy marriages.

Second, men have lost the institutions with which they have self-identified. The family structure has changed because women are gaining economic and therefore personal autonomy. The small family farm and rugged individualism have ceased to exist. The loyal fans of the sports team have been left in the parking lot as the teams are bought and sold like cattle. Career success has stopped being based on the Protestant work ethic. Instead, men are left without the purpose or control provided by a patriarchal system.

According to Faludi, the key to young men’s salvation is outside the limits of traditional gender roles and fatherly expectation. Herein lies Faludi’s own feminist perspective. She hopes that men can use organic forms of feminism to liberate themselves. Women, according to Faludi, actually used decisive masculine confrontation to pursue their liberation. Feminists framed their struggle for equality as a struggle against the male-dominated culture. In so doing, they tried to find meaning beyond the limits of the separate spheres. However, men have not protested against their betrayal; nor have they challenged the dominant culture as women have done. Why not? Faludi sees a paradox in the answer: “The model women have used to revolt is the exact one men not only can’t use but are trapped in” (p. 604). Men find it contradictory to confront a system supposedly of their own making and apparently to their own advantage. To solve this dilemma, men must find a way to define clearly what oppresses them. Then, they must come to understand that finding acceptance and ful-

fillment in life is not a function of being a man. On the contrary, finding acceptance and fulfillment in life is a function of being human.

Some criticisms can be made about Faludi's otherwise intriguing book. She uses more negative examples about American men than positive ones. Her case studies are frequently stereotypes. For example, in several interviews with Sylvester Stallone, Faludi found that the movie star, like seemingly all men of the baby boom generation, suffered from paternal betrayal and personal emptiness. After years of being typecast as the action hero and "feminized muscle man," Stallone had decided to play the anti-hero in the 1997 film "Copland." He had hoped this role would give him personal fulfillment and critical acclaim. Unfortunately, film reviews and box office receipts did not live up to Stallone's expectations. In Faludi's last interview with him after the film's run, Stallone had decided to return to his roots as the action hero. Faludi leaves the reader with the idea that the movie star had given up on himself. While her observations about Stallone as an individual are possibly legitimate, Faludi tries to use this movie icon's personal story as a symbol for American masculinity as a whole. This begins to stretch the limits of plausibility.

After reading *Stiffed*, one might think that every man in America is stunted by cultural pressures and unfulfilled expectations. Though this reviewer has no way to quantify this, there are undoubtedly millions of well-adjusted men in America who are successful in their quests for acceptance and fulfillment and who are also good fathers and loving husbands. Perhaps their stories also need to be heard.

Despite some criticisms, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* is an insightful book that should be read by both popular and academic audiences. Whether the reader agrees with her or not, Susan Faludi makes a valuable contribution to existing literature on masculinity.

**DAVID J. ULBRICH**  
Kansas State University

*Taking Care of Men: Sexual Politics in the Public Mind* by Anthony McMahon. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999, vii + 232 pages.

Reading Anthony McMahon's new book reminds one of those pundits who say that the new man is everywhere but he is nowhere to be found, at least not in discussions of the most important aspects of real change. McMahon wrote this book because he felt that "something was missing from most discussions about men and social change: A serious recognition of the central role men's material interests play in their motivation to defend the gendered status quo" (p. vi). McMahon concludes that just as women continue to take care of men, so too does the new rhetoric about men and change (more rhetoric than change). Despite all the talk of SNAGs (Sensitive New Age Guys) and mass mediated discussions of the post-feminist era, we are still left with an arbitrary and unjust sexual division of domestic labour. Why? Because underlying all of the rhetoric, men's material interests present us with strong material motivation to resist pro-equity change. While making his case, the author gives us a broad analysis based in statistical data, interview transcripts, and media analysis that take into consideration a variety of social, psychological, media, and cultural

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theories made accessible to scholars in a variety of disciplines.

The book is divided into three parts. "Part One: The Interests of Men" contains two chapters which serve to introduce readers from a variety of disciplines to the book. The first discusses the traditional meaning of having a "wife" as part of the division of labour and a male right. McMahon resists the temptation to develop a universal human nature onto which to ground his analysis. Instead, he pursues a middle course discussing the social construction of masculinity in relation to a struggle over interests, which are historically and socially dependent. Here McMahon takes us to an uncomfortable zone of analysis claiming that much of the silence in men's studies about the real reason for the sexual division of labour is something that any radical feminist knew 30 years ago: that men benefit from the exploitation of women. The second chapter begins to delve more deeply into this issue exploring the actual physical and bodily work that goes into nurturing and the daily reproducing of humans by linking it to an analysis of some of the grand narratives (Marxism in particular) that have guided social analysis. Here we see that Marxism's (for example) favouring of analysis of production over reproductive work is linked to the choices women have had to make between less competitive caring labour and "competing with the boys on their own terms" (p. 60). McMahon correctly points out that many of our most precious social scientific theories have been directly linked to the effort to resist changing men. Given the traditional place of most male academics and theorists (a job the old joke said "requires a wife"), in the gendered division of labour, another reason for the silence becomes clear. Importantly, the more we perpetuate the female/male sameness versus difference debate, it allows us to avoid looking at the really difficult questions such as why men resist change. Here we see that a very important part of change will be a restructuring of the discourse to issues of a deeply personal nature. McMahon's detailed analysis of the sexual division of domestic labour reinforces research arguing that men constitute a social and not a biological category.

"Part Two: The Revolving Door" contains three chapters that serve as the core of the book. McMahon looks at the "stalled rhetoric" (p. 65) highlighting the ways in which the so-called revolution in men has stalled. Here McMahon draws on social scientific data showing that women still do the bulk of domestic activity and earn significantly less than men. Who is it that takes parental leave? She whose income is typically less and she who has maternity leave as opposed to he who likely has no paternal leave. Whose career is set back by the mutual decision to have children, and who will be poorer for it if the partnership dissolves? She who typically made the "choice" to take leave and remain home with the children for a period after birth. McMahon mentions groups like the American Promise Keepers who perpetuate a public discourse and a private practice of misogyny as well as a backlash against pro-feminist men. The ability of such groups, who have a clear and vested interest in the perpetuation of patriarchy, to capture media attention and public fascination is one more aspect of the effort of men to resist gender change in McMahon's view. In this media marketplace of images, the new man becomes just one more "stock image in the cultural agenda" (p. 115). McMahon concludes this middle part of the book with a thought-provoking analysis of the place of "new man" imagery in the cultural notion that men need to be civilized by women. He posits that new man imagery is, in part,

another stage in the long history of making men fit for civilization.

“Part Three: The Blocked Door” takes us deeper into the most important contribution of this book—its claim that men are employing a variety of strategies to avoid open discussion of the real ways they benefit from patriarchal relations, not the least of which is the amount of free time men have at their disposal in relation to their spouse, especially after the birth of a child. After 20 years of promise, the real question remains off the public agenda. Indeed it is hidden by discourses such as: the perpetuation of the difference versus sameness debate; myths of the ways in which change hurts men psychologically or takes them from their essential masculine (read biological) nature; the efforts of the Christian and conservative right to dominate both women in the home and discourse on gender in public media. Each of these provides remarkable vehicles for avoiding the biggest problem of all: the basic fact that men benefit from the exploitation of women in material ways. For those of us practising gender reform and change, we learn from this book that the personal is the political for men as for women. If you want to know about the kind of world a man wants to live in, look at the kind of domestic relations he perpetuates in his own home. The home is where the heart is, and it is also at the core of real social change for McMahan.

If I have one criticism of the book, it is that it needed to go further in an exploration of strategies for dealing with the avoidance of the real issue for those interested in real change. Nonetheless, the book gives us much to think about, including a much-needed reassessment of our most cherished views about what the really important issues are. For years I have been fighting the same battle as McMahan in my sociology classes, often pointing to examples from my own domestic life. Men really interested in changing the unjust and arbitrary gender order would do well to do the same. This important book, which I recommend highly to educators, policymakers and activists, will help us to look at the most important and deeply personal questions of all. In the meantime, much of the discourse on the new man that so fascinates the public mind will continue to take care of men.

**GERRY COULTER**  
*Bishop's University*

***Female Masculinity*** by Judith Halberstam. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998, 329 pp.

Halberstam is very clear about what she hopes to achieve with her book. Since there is no comprehensive source on female masculinity, and most of what is written belies an anxiety about masculine women, one of the key goals of her book is to give female forms of masculinity a sense of pride and power. To do this, she seeks to recognize and validate the diversity of masculine expression in lesbian women. There is a range of expressions that encompass masculinity in women, each with its own history, characteristics, and representations. As a butch, her personal reasons for doing this are “to make my own female masculinity plausible, credible, and real” (p. 19). Another important goal is to understand female masculinity as distinct from male masculinity, or as she says, “conceptualizing masculinity without men” (p. 2). In the

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end, she hopes to make masculinity safe for women and girls, even heterosexual women, and that with more gender freedom, perhaps men will be able to re-create masculinity on her model of female masculinity.

The evidence she draws on to accomplish her goals are diverse. This book is part literary criticism, ethnography, history, and film and cultural studies. She reviews important historical figures from the 1800s and early 1900s, controversies about the notion of stone butch, debates between lesbian butches, female-to-male transsexuals, and transgenderists, documents and reviews cinematic portrayals of butches, and decodes drag king contests. Throughout she takes a dialectical approach: she reviews previous commentaries on an issue, usually from notable thinkers on the subject, and then she either elaborates on or criticizes their main points.

To make the point about diversity of masculinity in women, Halberstam asserts that in the 1800s and early 1900s, masculine women were known in several forms. There is evidence of tribades, female husbands, and inverts through analyses of court records, published diaries, case studies, and fiction of women who were noted for their masculinity. More recently, toward the middle of the 20th century, Halberstam notes the emergence of stone butches, transgender butches, female-to-male transsexuals. She even considers the diverse female masculinity in cinema including tomboys, predators, fantasy butches, cross-dressing women, “barely butches,” and “post-modern butches.” And in her analysis of drag kings, she finds a range of expressions from butch realness, in which the performer presents an authentic masculinity, to male mimicry, which tries to ironically reproduce a type of masculinity.

Halberstam is at her best and makes the strongest argument for diversity of female masculinity when she considers identities that intersect with gender such as race, class, and ethnicity. Her discussion of drag king performances, for example, hinges on the recognition that white male masculinity is often seen as natural and non-theatrical. This poses a problem for the drag king, who must render this form of masculinity visible before it can be performed. “Kinging” non-white and gay masculinities, however, is easier because these identities are already somewhat theatrical. White masculinities are often the target of parodies, while black and queer masculinities are often given tribute. Discussions of race and sexuality deepen her analysis substantially and fortify her assertion about the diversity of masculinity.

One of the key assumptions of this work is that masculinity does not have an essential tie to the male body. Of course, many people would disagree with this point since masculinity is usually synonymous with men and maleness. Reviewing a recent book *Constructing Masculinities*, Halberstam notes that while gender theorists often undo the assumption of a stable relation between gender and sex, they often fail to answer the question, “How does masculinity change when it is located in a female body?” Halberstam’s analysis of turn-of-the-century “inverts” is especially helpful for understanding female masculinity. According to turn-of-the-century sexologist Havelock Ellis, a masculine invert was born to female masculinity. Ellis sought biological evidence of inversion such as elongated clitorises, which would suggest a male path of development, but finds that actually masculine women are less developed—have smaller clitorises and breasts—than other women. Freud picks up this theme of immaturity in masculine women and proposes that female mas-

culinity is a derivative and inferior version of male masculinity. Yet, when we analyse the fictional, but largely biographical, stories of Radclyffe Hall, a contemporary of Freud's, we see nothing of the case. Indeed, what we see is a masculinity of a very different sort.

Radclyffe Hall's fiction offers a window into a community of women who were masculine; some lived their lives as men, others as masculine women. These women lived their lives as men without letting go of their femaleness. For instance, Radclyffe Hall called herself John, dressed mostly as a man in private, but often appeared in skirts in public. She defined her masculinity through her desire for feminine women and her masculine attire. When Radclyffe Hall wrote *The Well of Loneliness*, the main character Stephen is such a person. He has a "masculine identity expressed through a female self" (p. 95), a gender that "constitutes itself through clothing" (p. 99). That is, Stephen uses clothing to construct his inherent masculinity, believing the "dressed body, not the undressed body, represents one's desire" (p. 106). Thus, Halberstam notes that many women in Hall's community felt that "their masculine clothing represented their identities" (p. 107), a sentiment often echoed by current transgenderists.

The experience of masculinity among Hall's contemporaries would have been so much different from the naked naturalness of the male masculinities of the day such as that described by Freud. However, the assertion that their masculinity is "masculinity without men" is problematic. It makes sense that masculine men and women share very different histories, positions in society, bodies, and manners of enacting their gender. So the masculinity of men and women should be different. The problem, however, is that while the two masculinities are different, they exist in a relational context. That is, masculine women are very much aware of the masculinity of men, and perhaps, at various times in history and places in culture, masculine men are also aware of the masculinity of women. Halberstam admits that female constructions of masculinity have influenced male constructions of masculinity and that it would be foolish to assume that masculinity exists independent of femininity. As drag king culture illustrates, the performance of female masculinity is related to male masculinity, if only as parodies and satires of or tributes to male masculinity. Yet, the relationship between male and female masculinities is undeveloped in this book. A more complete understanding of female masculinity will be achieved when this analysis is placed in relation to male masculinity or male femininity.

**DARRYL B. HILL**

*Concordia University*

***Real Men or Real Teachers?: Contradictions in the Lives of Men Elementary School Teachers*** by Paul Sargent. Harriman, TN: Men's Studies Press, 2001, 248 pp.

We all have a starting point from which we build our awareness, experience, and analysis of gender. This, although many would have us believe otherwise, does not begin at birth (or conception if you are of that belief) as either a male or female. Rather, the awareness of gender as a social construct begins when others' opinions and expectations regarding our masculinity and/or femininity contradict all experi-

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ences leading up to that moment. For those men aspiring to be elementary school teachers and those who are already practicing teachers in the early elementary grades, gender boundaries and sex-role stereotyping would have become blatantly conspicuous through a similar kind of disruption in their everyday social experiences: whether it be in the form of suspicion or unfounded concern from the parents of students in the classes in which they teach, where as Paul Sargent suggests in *Real Men or Real Teachers* there is a “men don’t belong stereotype,” or as a result of the isolation of being the only male staff member other than the custodial staff in an elementary school. Working through the problematics of sex-role stereotyping and the hegemony of socially sanctioned gender roles are the focus of this critically astute yet approachable first book by Sargent.

*Real Men or Real Teachers* is presented as a journey of discovery on the part of the author. Each chapter progressively unravels more of the gendered network in elementary school teaching, exploring issues related to gender roles and occupational stereotyping, the demographics of gender in elementary schools, male teachers as the (reluctant) role-models for (male) children who are positioned as requiring gender-specific guidance and support, the culture of teaching as a gendered space, and a discussion of Sargent’s approach to conducting the research supporting this text. In so doing, and with due regard for his readership, Sargent engages in periodic theoretical analyses with a view to extending the ideas and insights taken from the interview transcripts that are prevalent in *Real Men or Real Teachers*. Sargent provides opportunities for us to (re)consider the traditional definitions of masculinity within the context of a specific group of men: male elementary school teachers.

Readers of *Real Men or Real Teachers* who are themselves male elementary school teachers will appreciate Sargent’s treatment of one of the more troublesome and concerning outcomes of sex-role stereotyping and hegemonic heterosexual masculinity: namely, issues arising out of the appropriateness of physical touch in teaching and interacting with students. As he reveals through first-hand accounts, teachers’ touching students is generally not considered a good or safe idea for either male teachers or students. The complexities of social touch in the school setting are in one regard obvious, while in another—in the demonstration of caring and respect for others—muddied. Sargent’s examination of men as nurturers in teaching, who in the same instance can be perceived as caregivers or as potential abusers, is progressive and contributes to the discussion of men as nurturing, caring, and emotionally complex and competent beings. Sargent provides us with the opportunity to read/listen first-hand to how students who may need or want hugs “don’t get [them] if they are in a man’s [class-]room.” This is none more clearly evidenced by the comments of one of the participants in Sargent’s research, who remarked:

Female teachers at school can have a child sitting on their lap during class time, and very few people would give it a second thought. It’s natural; it’s common.... But if someone walked into this room, and I had someone, a child, sitting on my lap, immediately some red flags would go up in most people’s minds. (p. 29)

Indeed, male teachers working in an environment in which they can at any point be positioned as abusers is problematic: for teachers, the students, and in the reinforcement of gender/sex-role stereotyping with respect to legitimate (or not) adult-child/student socialization.

Sargent suggests at the outset that *Real Men or Real Teachers* is for “the many men who would be wonderful teachers, parents, or caregivers but have experienced negative sanctions whenever they have attempted to lead gender atypical lives” (p. 1). I believe that Sargent offers much in this regard. For all those who teach, read, debate, and have an interest in re-evaluating gender roles within the institutions of care giving—I highly recommend this book. It is written, I believe, with an intent to inform its readership of the social, cultural, and historical implications of hegemonic gendering in schools and in societies. *Real Men or Real Teachers* challenges us to consider our own everyday social practice and most importantly our actions as educators.

**BLYE FRANK**

*Mt. Saint Vincent University*