

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JAMIE L. MULLANEY, *Everyone Is NOT Doing It: Abstinence and Personal Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, ix + 205 p. references + index.

Everyone is NOT Doing It: Abstinence and Personal Identity by Jamie L. Mullaney is a critically engaging text grounded within a symbolic interactionist framework. By acknowledging that the act of not doing is as significant as doing, Jamie Mullaney unpacks the conceptual relevance of abstinence as it pertains to identity formation. Traditionally, studies of abstinence have tended to focus exclusively on non-smoking and virginity. Mullaney's approach, however, examines a range of social abstainers, including those who avoid particular foods, sex, tobacco, and certain forms of technology. Mullaney argues abstinence is one way by which individuals seek to cope with the trials and tribulations of (post)modernity, thereby allowing them to develop a secure sense of self.

While holding static the political and moral debates surrounding forms of abstinence, Mullaney identifies the common elements between them and explores their effects on identity formation. This method allows Mullaney to discuss the commonalities that exist between acts of abstaining and their subsequent effects on the processes of identity construction and reconstitution over time. Through qualitative interviews with abstainers, Mullaney presents the reader with fascinating data that inspires a critical assessment of why acts of not doing have received such little academic attention.

The text is divided into two parts. The first four chapters examine the socially constructed nature of abstinence. Mullaney explains the shifting frames of abstinence over time vis-a-vis the changing socio-cultural and political landscape. The historical framing of abstinence as a path to religious salvation, social protest, and entertainment reveals the assumptions and practices made regarding abstinence both within an individualized and broader social context. Mullaney concludes the first section with a critical assessment of why people choose to be abstainers, and more importantly, how abstinence influences their sense of self in the past, present, and future. The final five chapters explore the lives of abstainers, including: conceptions of abstinence, fire walking as a performance strategy, strategies for identity maintenance, the performance or act of doing particular forms of abstinence based on contingency factors, and discourses of abstinence. Overall, the book offers compelling insight

into the lives of abstainers by explicating how particular lifestyle choices affect self-development.

I was somewhat disappointed, however, with the over-abundance of what were essentially mainstream examples of abstinence. To this end, non-conventional forms of abstinence would have been a fascinating contribution to the text. Such examples could have provided interesting information on social behaviours not traditionally studied by social scientists. Mullaney's omission does not, however, diminish the value of her insight.

Everyone is NOT Doing It makes an exceptional contribution to the identity literature. Mullaney's captivating perspective on issues of identity vis-à-vis a wide range of mainstream abstainers is fruitful as she is able to present a coherent, detailed analysis of why not doing is a critically important avenue for scientific research. Yet, in order to fully appreciate the author's insight, a degree of familiarity with the identity literature is required. That being said, this book is ideally suited for those interested in identity issues, the social construction of deviant identities, or the link between social labels and identity formation.

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