

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

TIM EDWARDS, *Cultures of Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 2006, 182 p.

Edwards argues that masculinities are everywhere yet un-have-able. This is because masculinities are ideas people develop about their bodies and their position in forms of sociality. Edwards identifies three distinctive waves of masculinity studies. The first wave reflected dominant trends in sex role theory. According to this perspective, growing boys aspire to a masculine ideal, which they are exposed to by socializing agencies and which they internalize without effort. The second wave critiqued the first wave for not concentrating enough on power differentials and for focusing on masculinity in the singular. Power theorists argue that hierarchally organized structures of power order the field of gender relations. A third wave emerged around questions of performativity. The performative paradigm views sex-based identities as regulatory fictions. Gendered bodies are performative, suggesting they have no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute their purported gender essence. Edwards' work is at the beginning of a fourth sort of paradigm of consolidation and integration in masculinities research.

Many authors claim that we are witnessing a "crisis of masculinity." The crisis is linked to the growth of equality for women and other conventionally marginalized groups, and the decline of traditionally male-centric, exciting activities like duels and combat. The crisis is perceived in the spheres of work, education, sexuality, health, crime and the family. For instance, the rupture between work and masculinity is said to cause psychological distress for men. Though some men's consciousness-raising groups have said that the grief in men is at an all time high and needs to be healed, Edwards concludes that there is little evidence of this recent crisis. Masculinity itself as an idea only emerged at a particular historical conjuncture: in liberal contract theory that had the novel task of trying to explain the position of men and women as a function of gender instead of nature. Ideas people have about their bodies and their position in forms of sociality have been unsettled for quite some time.

Particularly new, however, are commoditized forms of masculinity that take the shape of lifestyle magazines and body products. Cultures of consumption around the New Man (a trope representing the caring, sensitive man) and New Lad (a trope representing the football and pornography loving man) masculinities are staggering. Edwards also touches on representations of Black male bodies in relation to the

“emasculatation thesis” (the idea that Black men have been and continue to be emasculated through colonialism and imperialism).

Convincingly, Edwards writes that disciplinary and other forms of power work on subjectivity through the body. People are compelled to work on themselves, take their bodies as projects, and accumulate forms of body capital that satisfy the demands of particular gender regimes. He also conceives of meaning as residing in the body, inasmuch as people’s relationship with their bodies is always interpretive (for instance, pain is interpreted and experienced differently across bodies).

For Edwards, there has not been enough research on racialized masculinities, gay masculinities and violence in relation to masculinities that have advanced past the assumptions of gender role theory. Edwards’ book, which analyzes popular magazines and films as forms of data, opens a space for future studies of masculinities in these pertinent areas that go beyond gender role assumptions. *Cultures of Masculinity* will be enjoyed by those concerned with cultural studies, gender studies, men and masculinities, and those interested in the sociology of the body.

Although Edwards discusses how the development of masculinities as an object of analysis in social science is connected to changes in feminist theory, a book alleging to look at cultures of masculinities should offer more discussion about the idea of “female masculinities.” Female masculinities is a concept that refers to how women work on themselves to meet the demands of, or challenge, gender regimes dominated by masculine signifiers and valuations. There is nothing about masculinity that makes it a trait attributable to male bodies alone. Masculinities are not gender-limited ideals and attitudes. Masculinities are not determined by the referent of the penis. The concept of masculinities should be extended across gender positions so that we have an understanding of the multiplicity of masculinities, including female masculinities and hegemonic masculinities which emerge in particular contexts. Conceptualizing masculinities without men should be an important aspect of the masculinities research field.

Edwards also could have done more to challenge the performativity paradigm. The idea of performativity has been critiqued for its implications for agency, the subject, temporality, and the body. One consequence is that the wider range of socio-economic and cultural forces that compel us towards gender performatives are glossed over in the third wave of masculinity studies. Future studies might incorporate the performativity paradigm as a point of theoretical departure.

Overall, *Cultures of Masculinity* is a comprehensive book, a great contribution giving important direction to the still emerging field of masculinities research.

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