

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL, AMY ARONSON and AMY KALER, *The Gendered Society Reader (Canadian Edition)*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008, 448 p.

The Canadian edition of this popular American reader is almost Canadian as 19 of its 41 essays are written by Canadians. Among the 29 articles with substantive empirical content, 18 rest their claims on Canadian data, while the others are American, North American, and Australian in content. For those who do care to assemble their own packages of readings for introductory level courses, this book will prove a very useful resource. It is also a shrewdly crafted collection which will appeal to the dominant ideology in gender studies in Canadian universities today. It is typical of the mass-market style of textbook that does not ask too many disturbing political questions of its intended audience: university teachers committed to one or more left of centre feminist politics.

The first three parts of the book are comprised of twelve chapters regarding biological and cultural arguments concerning gender difference as well as the social construction of gender. David Buss offers the perspective of evolutionary psychology arguing that those interested in psychological sex differences should not ignore their evolutionary origin in sexual selection. Robert Sapolsky (a neurobiologist) writes an interesting and frank chapter on hormones, testosterone and violence arguing that the research on hormonal differences is unconvincing. Judith Lorber also challenges the assumptions of biology as more than bad politics – but bad science.

Five chapters by Sanday, Ruby, Herdt, Pomerance, and Hillyard assess gendering across different cultures in which students learn that gender inequality is a predictor of rape in societies; that the veil of the devout Muslim woman is imbued with a variety of meanings for its wearer; that “coming out” across different societies reveals connections between sexual and gender identities and that there are striking differences among these identities; that welfare policies often reinforce women’s financial dependency on men; and that there are multiple ways to negotiate masculinity and femininity (through an examination of girls who participate in “skateboard culture” in Vancouver). Together these chapters illustrate the contribution of cultural anthropology to our evolving understanding of the heterogeneity of culture. They also show students that cultures are not merely monoliths which allow only one way of being masculine or feminine.

Chapters by Gerson, West and Zimmerman, Gagne, and Theberge, offer theories and analysis of gender differencing and domination while pointing to strategies for resistance. West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not something owned by the individual but is, rather, a process which evolves through interaction with others. Gagne et al. examine the experiences of transgendered people in their construction of a new identity. This chapter illustrates very well the incredible diversity of ways of responding to the world. A good chapter by Nancy Theberge shows that women hockey players are not simply trying to create a feminized version of hockey. Her interview data reveals that we need to move away from the view that men's hockey is the gold standard for the sport. Until we do, the potential for women's hockey to challenge male dominance is considerably weakened.

The final six parts of the book are comprised of essays on the gendered family, classroom, workplace, body, intimacy, and violence. Given the high quality of the first three parts of the text one expects a good deal from these parts and one is not disappointed. Lillian Rubin contributes a nice chapter on the intersections of race, class and ethnicity with gender in families. The chapters on family are strengthened also by the analysis of immigration (families who have recently arrived from China); women engineers facing the challenges of motherhood; and Coltrane's discussion of housework, childcare and egalitarian attitudes. At the end of the section on family though, one is left wondering where is the same-sex family? This is a striking omission in a text which takes diversity as one of its founding principles. Also, where is the literature on fathering?

The section on gendered education pursues its subject from kindergarten through law and medical school and the micro-intersections which take place there between race, gender, and sexuality. The gendered workplace examines the devaluation of women's work and theorizes gendered organizations. Two interesting commentaries on the subtle persistence of practices of exclusion can be found in Joan Evan's chapter on male nurses and sexualization and the rare account by Tracey Lindberg of Aboriginal women's experiences with advanced education in law. Stiell and England's chapter on paid domestic workers in Toronto provides an interesting assessment of the construction of difference.

The gendered body is a very strong part of the text which examines the relationship between the body and the reproduction of the feminine and the masculine. This takes one chapter into an analysis of high performance figure skating and another into a narrative on women's experience of embodiment and health over time. This assessment of embodiment in everyday life is enriched by Fausto-Sterling's chapter on the five sexes.

Gendered intimacies looks at the idealized discourse on love and how this has changed over time. The five chapters which comprise this section make interesting reading for students on relationships among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth; first experiences of sex by men and women; casual heterosexual sex; and women's struggles with the state concerning fertility.

The final section on gendered violence begins with the reality that men are more violent than women. It moves on to link this reality to how understandings of girl gangs and violence have led to moral panic. This is one of the few times in the book that a sustained analysis of media comes into play. Overall we have five chapters here which reveal that masculinity and violence are bound together in our culture and imbricated in the construction of gender across diverse settings. The result is the disturbing pattern of violence toward transgendered people reported by Namaste. The chapter by Dobash et al. is a necessary contribution to the discussion of domestic violence today. Kaufman's chapter rounds out the book with his long-held view that only men can end male violence.

The book opted to forego a specific section on media to its detriment but overall this is a very strong collection of readings by both well established and new researchers in one of the most lively academic fields today. Among the text's deficiencies is the lack of an index. One has come to expect this from smaller houses but not from Oxford which clearly has the resources to properly index its texts. The end of each section includes a list of "Questions for Critical Thought." These questions are not particularly challenging to the field but they do raise many interesting issues for classroom discussion and may well spark some student enthusiasm for further research in this area.

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